

ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE PASSES EDUCATION FUNDING BILL: Overall Education Spending Essentially Flat, Striving Readers Slated to Receive a \$5 Million Increase**

Funding for the U.S. Department of Education would remain essentially flat under a spending bill that was passed by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education by a party line vote of 9-7 on June 7. The action by the subcommittee marks the first in a series of steps that will determine how much federal money will be available for education programs in fiscal year (FY) 2007. Next, the full House Appropriations Committee will consider the bill on June 13, but observers do not expect many changes to be made.

Under the version passed by the House subcommittee, the U.S. Department of Education would receive \$56.15 billion in discretionary funding in FY07, an increase of \$200 million (less than one-half of 1%) compared to FY2006, but \$1.74 billion higher than the amount that President Bush requested in his FY07 budget earlier this year.<sup>1</sup>

In crafting the spending bill, **Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula (R-OH)** chose to reinstate funding for several programs that President Bush sought to have eliminated. Among the programs that were slated for elimination in the president's budget, vocational education, GEAR UP, and TRIO were some that would have their funding restored to FY06 levels. Other programs such as the Smaller Learning Communities program and the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling program received funding, but at lower amounts than in FY06. (A chart of funding levels for selected education programs designed to help middle and high school students is included with this issue of *Straight A's*).

To restore funding for vocational education, Regula choose not to fund the plan to extend No Child Left Behind accountability into high schools that the president proposed to pay for by eliminating funding for the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, among other programs. The decision was not a surprise, considering that Congress rejected a similar proposal last year and Chairman Regula was on record opposing the use of vocational education grants to fund the proposal. "I don't think it's a good tradeoff. And I'm not going to do it this year either," Regula said earlier this year after a subcommittee hearing on the president's education budget.

<sup>1</sup> In FY06, Congress included \$1.6 billion in funding for Hurricane Katrina and Rita. Excluding that amount, Congress appropriated \$55.95 billion in discretionary spending for the U.S. Department of Education. President Bush's FY07 budget requested \$54.41 billion for the U.S. Department of Education.

## **House Subcommittee Passes Education Funding Bill** (Continued from p. 1)

The Striving Readers program is one of a handful of programs that would, under the subcommittee's bill, receive an increase in FY06—\$35 million which is an increase of \$5.3 million over FY06. However, that would still be \$65 million below the \$100 million that the president requested in his budget. While the small increase for Striving Readers is a positive step—especially considering the very tight budget—it will do little more than allow the Department to meet the obligations already committed to the eight existing grants. The bill would also provide \$35 million—an increase of \$10.4 million over FY06, but \$19.6 million less than the president's budget request—for statewide data systems which, among other things, would help enhance state capacity to accurately report high school graduation rates.

The Math and Science Partnerships program would receive \$225 million, an increase of \$42.8 million over FY06, and the Advanced Placement program would receive \$80 million, an increase of \$47.8 million, but less than the president's request of \$122 million. Increases to these latter two programs were a key component of the president's American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI). (More information on the ACI is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/StraightAs/Volume6No3.html#Budget>).

Title I would receive \$12.71 billion, an amount equal to FY06, which means that the percentage of Title I money that goes to high schools is unlikely to increase. (Currently about 5% of Title I funding goes to high schools.) The spending bill did include an additional \$200 million for a new School Improvement program that the president requested to help schools that have not been successful in raising the academic performance of disadvantaged children. While this program recognizes the need for targeting to specific schools, it is unclear how much—if any—of the money will go to high schools.

Overall, the bill would fund the departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education at approximately \$142 billion, which is \$4.1 billion more than President Bush requested and \$842 million more than FY06. However, Democrats were quick to note that the bill did not include extra funding that the House Republican leadership promised moderates in exchange for their support of the congressional budget resolution.

“The bill falls three billion dollars short of the amount promised to House Republican moderates by the Republican leadership during budget negotiations earlier this year,” read a statement from **Representative David Obey (D-WI)**, the ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee. “As a result, many important programs will be shortchanged.”

If the full House Appropriations Committee passes the bill as expected on June 13, it will likely move to the House floor for consideration during the week of June 19. Afterward, the debate will move to the Senate, which will likely be the best opportunity to increase funding levels for education programs. Without additional funding for education, health, and other important domestic programs, the final vote on the Labor-HHS-Education spending bill, which would come after a House-Senate compromise, is likely to garner little, if any, Democratic support. As a result, Republican leadership is likely to delay the final vote until after the congressional elections in November, to avoid putting Republican members from in the position of casting a politically damaging vote very close to an election.



## ***THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION: American High School Students Struggle to Compete Internationally in Math and Science; Rank is Higher in Reading but Below International Average***

American students' scores on international math and science tests indicate that they are not keeping pace with other students from around the world, according to a special analysis in the 2006 edition of *The Condition of Education*, published annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The report, which uses various national and international measures to evaluate the current state of education, finds that U.S. students perform relatively well in math and science in the lower and middle grades but struggle to apply those same skills in real-life applications by the time they reach high school.

“While our younger students are making progress on national assessments and are ahead on some international measures, the same cannot be said at the high school level,” said **Mark Schneider, NCES Commissioner**. “U.S. students do relatively well in reading literacy when compared to their international peers, but they are outperformed in mathematics and science and our 15-year-old students trail many of our competitors in math and science literacy.”

Based on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), U.S. fourth graders had higher reading literacy scores than the international average, earning higher scores than students in 23 of the 34 other participating countries in 2001. Sweden, the Netherlands, and England were some of the countries whose students scored above U.S. students, while German, Italian, and Canadian students scored about even with U.S. students.

On the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in reading, American 15-year-olds did not fare as well but managed to score near the international average. PISA tests students on their ability to apply reading skills to reading materials that they are likely to encounter as young adults, such as government forms, magazines, or books. Although the United States scored near the international average, its overall rank was lower than at the fourth-grade level because countries such as Australia, Ireland, and Japan, which were not tested at the fourth-grade level, scored higher than the United States. In addition, countries such as New Zealand, Iceland, Norway, and France, which scored lower than the United States at the fourth-grade level, moved ahead of the United States at the eighth-grade level.

When compared internationally in math, American fourth-grade students showed no measurable change in their academic performance over previous years, ranking near the middle of the 25 countries tested. At the eighth-grade level, American students also perform in the middle, but they demonstrated improvement since 1995. For example, of the 21 other countries that participated in both the 1995 and 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), U.S. eighth graders were outscored by 12 countries in 1995 but by only 7 countries in 2003. Overall, U.S. eighth-grade students outperformed their peers in 30 countries, on average, in 2003, and were outperformed by 14, including Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

While these scores are encouraging, the 2003 PISA in math demonstrated that American students struggle when asked to apply their mathematical knowledge to situations they are likely to encounter in everyday life. According to the results, American 15-year-olds had lower average

### *The Condition of Education* (Continued from p. 3)

mathematics literacy scores than the international average and lower scores than their peers in 20 of the 28 other participating countries. However, of the 30 countries that scored below the United States on the TIMSS, only 4 participated in PISA. In addition, several European countries, which typically score well, were included as participants, effectively driving the average higher. At the same time, four countries that scored lower than the United States on the TIMSS scored higher than the United States on PISA. In another discouraging finding, the United States had a greater percentage of students at the lowest levels of performance in mathematics literacy than the international average.

Similar to their results in math, U.S. fourth graders showed no measurable change in science performance, while eighth-graders showed some improvement. According to TIMSS, U.S. eighth graders performed above the international average in science and outscored their peers in 32 of the other 44 participating countries in 2003. Once again, however, U.S. 15-year-olds performed below the international average when they were asked to apply their science knowledge to everyday applications.

“This report mirrors recent NAEP results that show our high school students are losing ground when it comes to academic achievement, graduating without the skills they need for the workforce or college,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**. She praised No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for “remarkable gains” at the early grades but stressed that high school performance has remained static. She used the release of the report to promote the president’s plan to extend NCLB into high schools and the American Competitiveness Initiative, which would “work to increase academic rigor and improve math and science education. . . .”

In addition to comparing international test scores, the analysis also compares the U.S. student enrollment and high school graduation rate to those of other countries around the world. It reports that the percentage of the population aged 5–14 enrolled in school was 90% or higher in most developed countries, including the United States. However, the percentage of the U.S. population aged 15–19 enrolled in school was 75%, which is comparable to or below most other industrialized countries’ percentages. In addition, the U.S. graduation rate of 73% is below those of most industrialized countries, where 80% or more of students finish the international equivalent of high school.

The report also finds that the United States faces the many of the same challenges as other countries when it comes to educating students. For example, it states that 9% of the 15-year-olds in the United States spoke a “non-test” language, compared to the international average of 10%. In addition, only 9% of American 15-year-olds are foreign-born, compared to 10% internationally. However, the United States had the highest percentage of 15-year-olds from a non-two-parent family, with 45%. The international average of the 20 countries surveyed was 34%, and the country with the next highest percentage was Norway, with 36%.

The complete report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>.



## **IOWA AIMS TO IMPROVE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: New Legislation Will Raise Graduation Standards, Provide Additional Funding for Dropout Prevention and Teacher Salaries**

On June 1, **Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack (D)** signed new legislation that will reduce class size, raise graduation standards, and increase teacher salaries. Vilsack signed the legislation at East High School in Des Moines. He said that the bill was the most important that he has signed and called the day the proudest of his nearly 8 years as governor.

For the first time in the state's history, Iowa will now have graduation requirements statewide. "It is important that we send the message that young people will have to be prepared with a more rigorous and more relevant education if they are to compete," Vilsack said.

Under the new law, Iowa high school students will have to complete 4 years of English/language arts, 3 years of math, 3 years of science, and 3 years of social studies. Vilsack also announced an intention to develop a core curriculum for high schools that will "define the skills and the knowledge that young people will need to be successful in the future."

To help ensure that more students graduate from high school, one of the new laws will provide additional funding for Iowa's community colleges and for Jobs for America's Graduates (I-JAG) program. The I-JAG works to "reduce the number of students who are at risk of dropping out and help them to become productive youth," according to the Iowa Department of Education's website. The Iowa program, which is an affiliate of the 25-year-old national Jobs for America's Graduates organization, features a statewide system of school-to-work transition and dropout prevention for at-risk youth. It helps students develop workforce skills that enable them to be successful in the school-to-work transition and provides individual career planning and 1 year of post-high school follow-up.

The legislation will increase compensation for Iowa's teachers by \$210 million over the next 3 years and will raise the new minimum salary by \$1,000. It will also provide additional compensation for teachers who work in high-need schools and in subject areas in which there is a shortage, such as math and science. In his press conference, Vilsack noted that there are only five individuals in the entire state university system who are preparing to become physics teachers.

Read the news release and watch the press conference at [http://www.governor.state.ia.us/news/2006/june/june0106\\_1.html](http://www.governor.state.ia.us/news/2006/june/june0106_1.html).



## **A++ FOR FLORIDA: New Law Establishes Core Curriculum for Middle and High School Students, Requires High School Students to Choose a Major**

On June 5, **Florida Governor Jeb Bush (R)** signed his A++ Plan for Education, a new law that will increase the rigor and relevance of Florida's middle and high schools to better prepare students for postsecondary education and life after high school. In addition to required course work in middle school and high school, the new law also requires students to complete a personalized "academic and career plan" while in middle school and to select a "major area of interest" in which they will study in high school.

## **A++ For Florida** (Continued from p. 5)

“This bold measure will help prepare middle and high school students for the challenges ahead of them,” Bush said. “Our students will now take charge and plan for their future, realizing the decisions they make today shape their tomorrow. I commend the Florida Legislature for making these cutting-edge reforms a reality for the future generations of Florida students.”

Under the new law, middle school students must complete 12 core academic courses (3 each in English, math, science, and social studies), as well as 1 course in career and education planning, in order to be promoted to high school. Students must also complete a personalized “academic and career plan” during seventh or eighth grade. The legislation also requires every middle school to offer at least one high school-level math class for which students can gain credit toward earning their diplomas.

At the high school level, the legislation will require ninth-grade students to earn 16 core academic credits and 8 elective credits in order to receive their diplomas. Beginning in the 2007–08 school year, students will have to earn 4 credits each in English and math, 3 each in social studies and science, 1 credit in fine arts, and 1 credit in physical education and health.

The legislation will continue Florida’s strong commitment to the teaching of reading in the higher grades. It will require middle and high school students who score at the lowest level (Level 1 on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) to enroll in an intensive reading course. Students who score at Level 2 must take an intensive reading course or another course that provides reading instruction. The legislation will also make funding for reading a permanent part of the Florida Education Finance Program, which will ensure that school districts have adequate funding to serve the reading needs of their students.

The legislation also offers a series of teacher incentives that are designed to fill shortages in certain subject areas, such as math, science, and special education. It also provides additional compensation to teachers who work in low-performing schools.

One of the more controversial provisions in the legislation is its requirement that high school students select a “major area of interest” as part of their personalized education and career plans. Students must earn four credits in their major area of interest, which can be in the arts, advanced academic studies, or career preparation. Students will be able to change their area of interest and can use their remaining four elective credits to choose a second major area of interest, a minor, or other elective classes.

“I just don’t think it’s a good idea,” said **Valerie Walker, a rising senior at Godby High School and the incoming student member of the Leon County School Board**, in the *Tallahassee Democrat*. “My reasoning is that high school is a time to learn who you are and to define what you believe. It’s too premature to declare your major this early. There are other issues that need to be on the forefront. High school students have a very high bar to meet without having to decide on a major.”

More information on the legislation can be found in the press release, which is available at <http://www.flgov.com/release/7878>.



## **MICHIGAN BUSINESSES DISSATISFIED WITH GRADUATES: Survey Stresses Importance of Continued Education After High School**

Only slightly more than half of Michigan businesses are satisfied with the quality of employees that come out of Michigan's high schools, colleges, and universities, according to a new survey by EPIC-MRA conducted for the Your Child coalition and *The Detroit News*. The survey also criticized Michigan employers for demanding top-flight graduates but hiring low-skilled workers and complaining about their lack of qualifications and workforce readiness.

"Michigan businesses can do so much more to develop the kind of workforce we need to thrive in the knowledge economy," said **Judith Bailey, president of Western Michigan University and spokesperson for Your Child**. "Businesses must not only demand high standards of K–12 schools, colleges and universities, [but] businesses must [also] uphold those standards in hiring and supporting its workforce."

The survey finds that only 53% of 850 businesses in Michigan were satisfied with the quality of workers who come from Michigan's high schools and colleges, with 21% saying they were "very satisfied" and 32% "somewhat satisfied." On the other hand, 40% said they were dissatisfied with the quality of workers. According to the survey, the employers who were most vocal about a lack of quality among workers were also the ones most likely to hire minimally qualified workers. It finds that 66% of employers who are dissatisfied with their workers were likely to hire people with only a high school diploma in the coming year.

The survey also reports that high school dropouts, as well as high school graduates without any postsecondary education, face an uncertain future. In fact, only 22% of the businesses surveyed said that they would hire an individual without a high school diploma. Nor do high school graduates without additional education enjoy a great deal of job security. According to the survey, individuals with only a high school diploma are about 3 times as vulnerable to layoffs as those with some college coursework (59% compared to 21%) and they are about 6 times as vulnerable as those with a college degree (59% versus 10%).

Businesses place a higher value on education than parents do. According to the survey, 85% of businesses said that getting a good education is more important than it was 20 years ago. In addition, about 60% of businesses said that every student should get an education beyond high school, and 55% said that getting a good education is essential to success in life—almost double the percentage of parents (27%) who feel the same way.

The survey excluded businesses that largely require only a high school diploma, such as fast-food restaurants. The mean size of the businesses surveyed employed 157 people and had \$8.3 million in gross sales in the past year.

The complete survey is available at <http://www.epicmra.com/RecentSurveys.htm>.

***Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress*** is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC, 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.



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