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Public Education Policy And Progress



## **HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE PASSES EDUCATION FUNDING BILL: Appropriations Bill Would Provide Large Increases for Title I and Pell Grants, but No Increase for Striving Readers**

The U.S. Department of Education would receive \$61.7 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2008 under the Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill approved by a House Appropriations subcommittee on June 7. This represents an increase of \$4.2 billion (7.4 percent) over the FY 2007 level and \$5.5 billion over the amount requested by President Bush in his FY 2008 budget.

In recent weeks, President Bush has threatened to veto spending bills that have a price tag above the amount in his budget request, and that certainly is a possibility for the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. However, **Representative David Obey (D-WI), the chairman of both the House Appropriations Committee and the House Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee**, received significant praise from Republicans on the subcommittee for his handling of the bill. For instance, **Representative James T. Walsh (R-NY)**, the top Republican on the subcommittee, said that he would have allocated the funds in a similar fashion.

Specifically, the bill would provide a \$1.9 billion increase for Title I (8.4 percent over FY 2007). Of that total, \$500 million would go to fund the president's request for School Improvement Grants for schools that have failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress for at least two consecutive years. However, the subcommittee did not adopt the president's proposal to designate \$1.2 billion of Title I money for high schools in an effort to increase the high school share of Title I allocations and expand the impact and rigor of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) standards into high school.

The subcommittee also chose not to provide the \$68.8 million increase for the Striving Readers program that the president requested, instead choosing to fund the program at the same \$31.2 million amount it received in FY 2007. Currently, only eight programs nationwide receive funding under the Striving Readers program—even though the U.S. Department of Education received close to 150 applications in the initial competition and nine hundred intentions to apply for a grant. Without an increase in funding, no new grants are expected; the Department announced in March that it will use FY 2007 funds to continue to support the eight Striving Readers projects that were first funded in March 2006.

## House Subcommittee Passes Education Funding Bill

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The Reading First program, for which the president requested \$1 billion, received a lot less. In fact, the subcommittee cut the program by \$629 million, or 61.1 percent, as a sign of disapproval over the way the program was implemented. Over the past few months, investigations focused on the program's implementation have revealed cases of mismanagement and have raised ethical questions. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education's inspector general has found that federal officials appeared to prefer the use of certain commercial programs and discouraged others during the implementation of Reading First. "This [Reading First] cut will not be restored until we have a full appreciation of the shenanigans that have been going on," said Obey.

The largest single increase in the bill is for Pell grants, which were allocated an additional \$2 billion, a 14.6 percent increase over FY 2007 and \$2.2 billion more than the president's request. This increase would raise the maximum Pell grant award by \$390, to \$4,700.

Also slated for an increase is the Elementary and Secondary Schools Counseling Program, which would receive \$61.5 million, an increase of \$26.9 million. If the school counseling program were to receive more than \$40 million, grants could be awarded to both elementary and secondary schools. Previously, per NCLB requirements, grants could only be distributed to elementary schools if the amount appropriated for the school counseling program was less than \$40 million.

The bill also includes increases for teacher quality (\$300 million), afterschool centers (\$125 million), and English language learners (\$106 million).

The next step for the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill is to be considered by the full House Appropriations Committee, probably on June 14. It is expected to be approved by the full committee and to go to the House floor for a vote during the week of June 18.

A chart containing funding levels for selected education programs is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/legislative/FY08budget.html>.



### **ANSWERING THE QUESTION THAT MATTERS MOST: New Report Finds Higher Scores on Reading and Math Tests Since Enactment of NCLB**

Student scores on state reading and math tests have improved in the five years since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law, according to a new report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP). The report, *Answering the Question that Matters Most: Has Student Achievement Increased Since No Child Left Behind?*, includes verified data from all fifty states—much of which is available for the first time—and investigates achievement trends both before and after the passage of NCLB.

In a statement, **U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings** pointed to the findings of the report as evidence that NCLB should be reauthorized. "I'm greatly encouraged by the findings of the Center on Education Policy's report," she said. "This study confirms that No Child Left Behind has struck a chord of success with our nation's schools and students. ... We know the

law is working, so now is the time to reauthorize No Child Left Behind and continue the promise of a quality education for all of America's children."

The CEP report does not, however, credit NCLB for improvements in student achievement. In fact, it is careful to note that there is a difference between scores going up *since the enactment of* NCLB and scores increasing *because of* NCLB, adding that it is "difficult, if not impossible," to determine the extent to which improvements in test scores can be attributed to NCLB.

"With all of the federal, state, and local reforms that have been implemented simultaneously since 2002, it becomes nearly impossible to sort out which policy or combination of policies is responsible for test score gains, and to what degree," the report reads.

Because many states had reform efforts underway before NCLB was enacted, CEP needed several years of data to determine whether a state's pace of improvement had increased or slowed down since NCLB was enacted. Unfortunately, only thirteen states had sufficient data to perform the comparison. Of those states, nine had improved their test results at a greater yearly rate after NCLB was enacted. In the other four states, the pre-NCLB rate of average yearly gain was greater than the post-NCLB rate.

"American educators and students were asked to raise academic achievement, and they have done so," said **Jack Jennings, president and CEO of the Center on Education Policy**. "The weight of evidence indicates that state test scores in reading and mathematics have increased overall since No Child Left Behind was enacted. However, there should be no rush to judgment as there may be many factors contributing to the increased achievement."

In addition to changes in policy at all levels of government, the report mentions several other factors that could have led to higher scores, including a greater focus on teaching to the test; more lenient tests, scoring or data analyses, and changes in the populations tested.

Elementary-level math is the area in which the most states showed improvement, with thirty-seven of the forty-one states with available data demonstrating moderate-to-large gains, and no states showing declines of that magnitude. At the high school level, CEP finds that more states had test score gains in high school than declines. However, it also notes that more states showed declines in reading and math achievement at the high school level than in the earlier grades. Overall, five states showed declines in both middle school and high school reading, versus only three states in elementary school reading. In math, two states showed declines in middle school while five states showed declines in high school. At the elementary school level, only two states showed a decline in math.

CEP also determined that states have been somewhat successful in closing the achievement gap between white students and their Hispanic and African American classmates. In fact, it finds that fourteen of the thirty-eight states with sufficient data had narrowed gaps in reading scores across all three grade spans (elementary, middle, and high school) while no states had seen the gap widen. In math, twelve states showed gaps narrowing, while only one state showed the gaps widening. CEP reported similar results for Hispanic and low-income students. However, the report also finds that even

***Answering the Question that Matters Most*** (Continued from p. 3)

with narrower achievement gaps, the difference in scores between white students and their minority and low-income classmates often amounts to 20 percentage points or more, suggesting that it will take a “a concerted, long-term effort to close them,” the report reads.

When comparing results on state tests to results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), CEP finds that states “show more positive results on their own tests than on NAEP.” It also finds that states with the greatest gains on their own tests were usually not the same states that had the greatest gains on NAEP. However, CEP cautions that NAEP should not be treated as a “gold standard to invalidate state test results,” but rather as an “additional source of information about achievement” because NAEP tests are not aligned with a state’s curriculum as state tests are.

In performing its analysis, CEP found that state data was not easy to access in some states, and, when available, data was often inconsistent, outdated, or incomplete. Among the reasons for incomplete data, the report lists overburdened state departments of education, ongoing corrections in test data, and technical or contractual issues with test contractors. In order to increase transparency in state data, CEP recommends that states post test data in an easy-to-find place on state websites; provide clear information on and caution users about breaks in the comparability of test data due to new tests; and report standard deviations, mean scale scores, numbers of test-takers, and other important information.

The complete report and individual state profiles are available at <http://www.cep-dc.org>.



***MAPPING 2005 STATE PROFICIENCY STANDARDS ONTO THE NAEP  
SCALES: New Research Report Compares NAEP and State Proficiency Standards***

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), states must test students annually in grades three through eight and once in high school in reading and mathematics. The law allows each state to design its own test and to set a score that all students must meet to be considered proficient. However, there is no way to compare results across states, and, as a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics notes, the percentages of students deemed proficient vary widely across states for a given subject and grade.

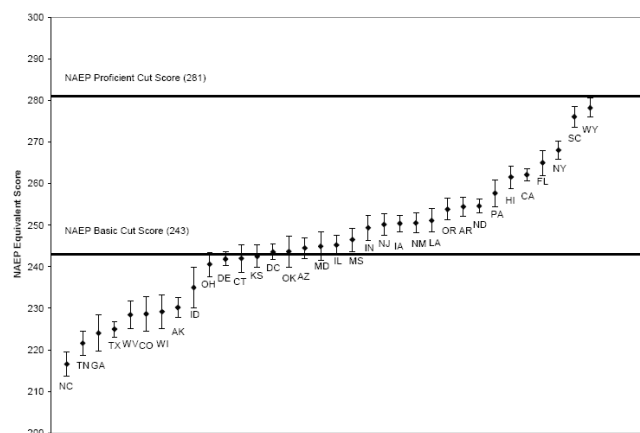
The report, *Mapping 2005 State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales*, suggests that the wide difference in scores could be due to differences in the stringency of the standards adopted by the states. In an effort to compare the various state tests, the report’s authors use a mapping exercise to project state standards onto the scale used by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Specifically, the authors use the percentages of students who reach proficiency on state tests in reading and math to estimate what the equivalent proficiency score would be on the NAEP tests in reading and math.

For example, in Hawaii, only 20 percent of eighth-grade students scored at the proficient level on the state test in math. However, by using the mapping exercise, the report’s authors project that scoring at proficiency on Hawaii’s state test would be equivalent to scoring 296 on the NAEP test in math. Conversely, while 88 percent of Tennessee’s eighth graders scored at proficiency on

the state test in math, the proficient level on the Tennessee test would equal a score of 230 on the NAEP test. In order to score at the proficient level on NAEP, a student would need a score of 299 or above. A score of 262 or above would place a student at the basic level on NAEP.

Turning to eighth-grade students' reading scores, the report finds that only 57 percent of Arkansas's students scored at proficient on the state test, but that scoring at proficient on the Arkansas test is equivalent to scoring 254 on the NAEP test in reading. In North Carolina, however, 88 percent of eighth-grade students scored at proficient on the state test, but scoring at proficient on the North Carolina state test is only equivalent to scoring 217 on the NAEP test, as reflected in the chart to the right. A score of 243 would place a student at the basic level on NAEP while a score of 281 would place him or her at the proficient level.

Figure 3. NAEP score equivalents of states' proficiency standards for reading, grade 8: 2005



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2005 Reading Assessment, and National Longitudinal School-Level State Assessment Score Database (NLSASD).

The report also offers several key findings about state tests as they relate to the NAEP test. Specifically, it finds that states vary widely in the NAEP equivalents of their proficiency standards, with up to an eighty-one point difference in proficiency standards between the states. In addition, as evidenced by the chart above, most state proficiency standards fall within the NAEP basic range—except in fourth-grade reading, where most fall below basic.

The complete report, which includes charts for fourth-grade reading and math, as well as eighth-grade math, is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/studies/2007482.pdf>.



### ***A POSSIBLE DREAM: New Report Examines Teacher Shortfall in California, Concludes that a Lack of Support, Not Low Pay, Drives Teachers from Classrooms***

Research has found that California's teacher shortfall is expected to increase from 20,000 in 2005 to 33,000 in 2015 if the state does not take action to keep more teachers in the profession. An unusually high number of teachers are expected to retire in the next few years, while the number of new teachers entering the field is expected to decline; however, the principal cause of the shortfall is that many teachers leave the profession before they reach retirement age.

Why do teachers leave early? According to a new survey of nearly two thousand of California's current and former teachers, more than half who left the profession did so not because of low pay, but because of concerns over inadequate supports such as a lack of time for planning or professional development, and because of bureaucratic impediments such as classroom interruptions, unnecessary meetings, and too little say over the way their schools are run. The survey's findings are captured in *A Possible Dream: Retaining California Teachers So All*

*A Possible Dream* (Continued from p. 5)

*Students Learn*, a new report from the California State University (CSU) Center for Teacher Quality.

“Too many teachers leave the profession prematurely—critical problems in the teaching and learning environment are literally driving teachers from the classroom,” said **Dr. Ken Futernick, the principal author of the report and the director of K–12 Studies at the CSU Center for Teacher Quality at CSU Sacramento**. “If California is going to resolve its teaching shortage and improve instruction for all students, we need to make changes that will keep teachers in the classroom and convince some who have left to return.”

Teacher compensation is often cited as a chief reason that teachers leave the profession, but the report finds that teacher pay is less important than the support that teachers receive in their schools. It also finds that although better compensation certainly matters to teachers, teacher retention rates are unlikely to improve by increasing teacher pay unless there is a corresponding focus on improvements to the teaching and learning environment.

The importance of support systems for teachers is also evident in the responses of teachers who are happy in the profession and plan to stay. When asked why they planned to stay in the profession, satisfied teachers cite their ability to provide meaningful input in the decisionmaking process at their schools and strong, collaborative relationships with their colleagues. Satisfied teachers also stress the importance of adequate time for planning and resources for classroom learning materials as reasons for staying. According to the report, when these positive conditions were in place, many “stayers” viewed their compensation as adequate and as a reason for staying in the profession.

Unfortunately, far too many of California’s teachers lack these necessary support systems. The report notes that, annually, close to eighteen thousand of California teachers leave the profession before reaching retirement age. It also finds that 22 percent of California teachers leave the profession after their first four years in the classroom and another 10 percent transfer away from high-poverty schools each year.

The cost of replacing teachers who leave is staggering. The report points to research from the Alliance for Excellent Education that says that California spends more than \$455 million each year to recruit, hire, and prepare replacement teachers. The most serious consequence of high teacher turnover, however, is not the financial impact, but the loss of continuity, experience, and expertise that negatively impacts the educational experience of students.

Far more often than not, the impact of qualified teachers leaving the profession is most directly felt in high-poverty, high-minority schools. In California, 21 percent of teachers in these schools lacked a teaching credential in 2005. The impact of the teaching shortage also hits high schools. In fact, 15 percent of math and English teachers in California high schools lacked a major or minor in the subject they taught.

According to the report, cutting the teacher attrition rate would mean that teachers would be less likely to transfer from hard-to-staff schools. It notes that if California could cut teacher attrition by 30 percent, it would prevent five thousand teachers from leaving the profession every year. In

addition, if California could make improvements to teachers' work environments, even without increases in salary, teachers who have left teaching would return to the classroom. The report points out that if the state could increase the rate at which teachers reenter the profession by 30 percent, the overall supply of teachers would increase by 500 annually.

The complete report is available at [http://www.calstate.edu/teacherquality/documents/possible\\_dream.pdf](http://www.calstate.edu/teacherquality/documents/possible_dream.pdf).

The Alliance issue brief *Teacher Attrition: A Costly Loss to the Nation and to the States*, which provides a state-by-state analysis of the high price that states pay each year to replace teachers who leave the profession, is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/TeacherAttrition.pdf>.

### Save the Date(s):

- **The Alliance for Excellent Education's Fourth Annual High School Policy Conference**

This year, Congress has the opportunity to improve the nation's high schools as it considers the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The question is whether Congress has the will to do so. In an effort to ensure that Congress's deliberations adequately address the needs of high schools, the Alliance for Excellent Education will hold its fourth annual high school policy conference, *From No Child Left Behind to Every Child a Graduate*, on October 4–5, at the Washington Court Hotel in Washington, DC. The conference will convene local, state, and national education leaders to discuss federal strategies for improving the achievement of the nation's struggling middle and high school students.

Last year's conference examined the consensus that has been building around a federal agenda for high school reform. Leveraging that momentum, this year's conference will focus on explicit policies that should be included in the reauthorization of NCLB to improve high schools.

The conference will provide policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders with concrete information about and recommendations for what Congress should do to improve the nation's secondary schools. Federal policymakers will be making decisions influencing American middle and high schools; this conference will support their efforts to ensure that those decisions are wise and effective.

More information about the agenda and registration will be posted in the next few weeks at <http://www.all4ed.org/events/index.html>.

- **The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future's 2007 Annual Symposium**

On July 8–10, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) will hold its 2007 annual symposium, *Schools Organized for Success: The Future of Teaching*. The symposium will provide the opportunity to collaborate with coalitions from over thirty states to develop and refine strategies for improving teaching quality, school performance, and student achievement. Presenters at the conference include **Monica Martinez of KnowledgeWorks Foundation, John Bransford of the LIFE Center at the University of Washington, and former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley.**

More information on the symposium, including a preliminary agenda and registration details, is available at [http://nctaf.org/resources/events/annual\\_symposia/2007AnnualSymposium.htm](http://nctaf.org/resources/events/annual_symposia/2007AnnualSymposium.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 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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