



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



NCLB TURNS FIVE: Key Players in Reauthorization Process Celebrate Fifth Anniversary of Landmark Education Law, Begin Discussions on How to Improve It

January 8 marked the fifth anniversary of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the landmark education law that brought increased accountability to the nation's schools and set a goal of getting all students performing at grade level in reading and math by 2014. During a series of ceremonies and events held that day, many of the key players from five years ago gathered, not only to celebrate the anniversary, but also to talk about ways to improve the law, which is scheduled to be reauthorized this year.

At an Oval Office meeting, President Bush met with **Senators Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and Mike Enzi (R-WY), the chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions** and **Representatives George Miller (D-CA) and Buck McKeon (R-CA), the chairman and ranking member of the House Committee on Education and Labor**, along with **U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**. According to *Education Daily*, the event marked the first bipartisan, bicameral meeting Bush has held on education since the 2001 negotiations over NCLB.

During the meeting, President Bush said that he was “proud” of the law and called it an “important first step toward making sure every child gets a good education in America.” The president also expressed confidence that Republicans and Democrats would be able to come together and complete work on the law's reauthorization. “In our discussions today, we've all agreed to work together to address some of the major concerns that some people have on this piece of legislation, without weakening the essence of the bill, and get a piece of legislation done,” he said. “We showed in the past that we can work together to get positive results, and I'm confident we can do so again.”

In recent months, many observers questioned whether Democrats would be willing to work with President Bush on the reauthorization of NCLB, especially after several years of Bush budget proposals that they believed underfunded the law. After their meeting with the president, Kennedy and Miller seemed energized to begin work but made it obvious that additional funding would be a key concern during the reauthorization process.

“We've learned a lot from the past five years, and we know changes are needed to help improve and strengthen the law,” said Senator Kennedy. “Today's meeting with President Bush was productive, but it's time to see some action.”

“The No Child Left Behind Act has brought important changes to our public education system— for example, by shining a spotlight on the persistent achievement gap that exists among different

NCLB Turns Five (Continued from p. 1)

groups of students in our country,” said Chairman Miller. “But if we are going to fulfill our original commitment to children and parents, then the law, its implementation, and its funding must be improved.”

Spellings Says Renewing NCLB is One of the President’s “Top Priorities,” Adds that Focusing on High Schools is “Critical”

In a speech at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce earlier that morning, Secretary Spellings expressed confidence that Chairman Kennedy, Senator Enzi, Chairman Miller, and Representative McKeon would continue to be “strong supporters” of NCLB and said that renewing the law was one of the president’s “top priorities.”

As evidence that NCLB was working, Spellings pointed to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, that showed that the nation’s younger students made more reading progress in five years than in the previous twenty-eight combined. She added that reading and math scores are reaching all-time highs for younger students.

“The truth is, No Child Left Behind helps kids by measuring their progress and holding schools accountable for helping them improve,” she said. “It helps teachers by providing them with information to better manage their classrooms, and resources to improve and enrich their teaching. And it helps businesses by helping students gain the skills they need to succeed.”

At the same time, Spellings acknowledged that the nation’s education system “has not kept pace with the rising demands of the workplace.” As examples, Spellings noted that half of African-American and Hispanic students fail to graduate from high school on time and that two-thirds of high-growth, high-wage jobs require a college degree, but only one third of Americans have one.

In speaking about reauthorization, Spellings expressed a desire to preserve the principles of NCLB but acknowledged that some improvements were necessary. She did not provide specifics but posed a few “big questions” that needed to be answered. “Are we going to make accountability as meaningful as it should be?” she asked. “What will it take to help the students who are struggling the most? How are we going to use people and time more effectively to reach the neediest students?”

During the question-and-answer portion of the event, **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** asked Secretary Spellings how the upcoming NCLB reauthorization would address high schools.

“I think it’s an absolutely critical reflection point for No Child Left Behind,” Spellings said in her response. “I think we’ve proved that the core principles of No Child Left Behind can and do work and that’s why we’ve seen such progress where we’ve emphasized attention: early grades, reading and math. But where we have paid less attention—in our middle schools and our high schools—we have not seen the kind of progress that we [need]. . . . We need more accountability, more measurement; we need to have more breadth to our accountability system with respect to other subjects, and we need to focus on graduation rates.”

Spellings also mentioned the lack of alignment between states' K–12 systems and their higher education systems. “[We have] literally states with no high school graduation requirements,” she said. “It’s absolutely critical that we focus on high schools this year.”

A written transcript of Spellings’s speech is available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2007/01/01082007.html>.

Video of the speech, including the question-and-answer session, is available at http://www.uschamber.com/webcasts/2007/070108_lieb_spellings.htm.

Four States to Join State Scholars Initiative

Last month, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced that the U.S. Department of Education had chosen four additional states to participate in its State Scholars Initiative. The initiative is a business-education partnership that seeks to increase the number of students who take rigorous courses in high school.

“Students who take rigorous courses in high school stand a far greater chance of succeeding in college and the workforce,” Spellings said. “We congratulate the states of Missouri, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Wyoming for recognizing the potential of this program and the considerable benefit that it can provide young people.”

As part of the State Scholars Initiative, each state will receive up to \$300,000 during a two-year period to implement the program in at least four school districts. In those districts, volunteers from the business community will make presentations to eighth-grade students to help them understand the career options and monetary benefits that come with taking challenging courses. Presentations will occur right before students select their high school courses.

The State Scholars Initiative’s course of study includes four years of English, three years of math (including Algebra I and II and geometry), three years of science (biology, chemistry, and physics), three and a half years of social studies (U.S. history, world history, geography, economics, or government), and two years of language other than English.

The four additional states join twenty others previously chosen for participation. They include: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

The complete announcement is available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2006/12/12142006.html>.



GOVERNORS PROPOSE HIGH SCHOOL REFORMS IN STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: More Rigor, Higher Compulsory Attendance Age Are Popular Solutions

Several of the nation’s governors mentioned the need to be more globally competitive and to raise high school graduation rates as key challenges when they outlined their education plans in state of the state addresses earlier this month. Their proposals ranged from ramping up the rigor of high school curriculum and increasing the compulsory attendance age to focusing on math, science and technology education.

Arizona: Napolitano Introduces “One Arizona” Initiative

In her state of the state address on January 8, **Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano (D)** introduced her “One Arizona” initiative, a three-part plan for ensuring the state’s standing as a twenty-first-century center of innovation. The education component, which she called the “heart”

Arizona: Napolitano Introduces “One Arizona” Initiative (Continued from p. 3)

of the plan, would guarantee that every young person who graduates from an Arizona school is truly prepared for a world of global competition and innovation.

“Arizona students no longer compete only against each other,” she said. “To thrive in the twenty-first century, they must be able to hold their own in the world. Business horizons are wider than they’ve ever been; jobs require more students than ever to be prepared for high-skill professions; and Arizona graduates need to be able to think through challenges and propose solutions that are creative and clear.”

Napolitano proposed expanding high school graduation requirements to include four years of math, three years of science, and “a solid grounding in language arts, civics and the fine arts.” She also plans to increase the state’s compulsory attendance age from sixteen to eighteen, while increasing funding for tutoring, mentoring and special services aimed at students at risk of dropping out.

To justify her high school proposals, Napolitano cited the economic imperative for students to attain more than a basic secondary education. She noted emphatically that “of jobs that pay a realistic livable wage in Maricopa County, less than 2 percent are available to those with only a high school diploma. Less than 2 percent!”

Napolitano also proposed raising teachers’ minimum starting salary to \$33,000, providing incentives for teachers in high-need schools, and expanding the state’s commitment to mentoring and retaining new teachers.

Governor Napolitano’s complete speech is available at <http://www.azgovernor.gov/documents/2007%20SOS%20Address%20Public.pdf>.

Colorado: Ritter Highlights Importance of Education to Business Community

On January 11, **Colorado Governor Bill Ritter (D)** devoted a large part of his first state of the state address to the connection between quality education and the state’s business interests.

“The best economic-development tool is a well-educated workforce,” he said. “But too many of our kids are dropping out of high school. ... Right now, about 30 percent of Colorado high school students don’t graduate. Less than half of the black, Latino, and American Indian students who start high school in Colorado actually finish. Less than half.”

To help improve the outcomes for Colorado students, Ritter called for more alignment between the state’s educational requirements and the demands of the global marketplace. He noted that students in the state have trouble competing for jobs in twenty-first-century industries such as renewable energy, aerospace, and biomedicine.

“Too many of Colorado’s children aren’t prepared for these jobs,” Ritter said. “The maintenance director of the state’s biggest wind farm told me his number one challenge is a lack of tech-savvy workers. Contractors will tell you it’s not uncommon to teach young employees remedial math at construction sites because they didn’t learn enough in school.”

Ritter also set a goal to cut the state's dropout rate in half within ten years and proposed a parallel initiative to halve the thirty-point performance gap on Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) exams that separates poor and minority students from affluent and white students.

To accomplish his broader goals for economic development, Ritter announced a Colorado Jobs Cabinet representing a diverse cross section of business leaders and representatives from education, economic development, and workforce development agencies. Among this group's core charges is the alignment of education programs and funding with statewide economic development strategies.

Ritter also discussed partnering with the state's teachers to advance reform and create a more rigorous curriculum. He pledged to streamline the state's myriad accountability systems so that there is "one system that provides meaningful data in a timely fashion."

Governor Ritter's complete speech is available at <http://www.colorado.gov/governor/speeches/2007/state-of-state-jan11.html>.

Georgia: Perdue Calls for "Graduation Coaches" in State's Middle Schools

On January 10, **Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue (R)** reflected on the state's recent accomplishments and pledged to build on them as he begins his second term, hoping to "move Georgia from a good state to a great state, a state of the future." His speech referred to education as "the single most important factor in the future prosperity of our state."

Perdue highlighted the progress that Georgia has made in education since 2003, including the recent implementation of a program which places "graduation coaches" in high schools. He also boasted that Georgia's teachers are the highest paid in the Southeast and vowed to retain that status with a minimum 3 percent raise for all educators this year.

However, Perdue added that these achievements were not enough, especially given that over 2,000 students drop out before ninth grade, and asked the legislature to expand his graduation coach program to the state's middle schools. If enacted, middle school coaches would work with students, families, and their high school counterparts to ease the transition to high school and to help students prepare for a more rigorous curriculum. Perdue also said that he will be enlisting the aid of the business community to connect with these coaches.

Governor Perdue's complete speech is available at <http://www.gov.state.ga.us/press/2007/press1326.shtml>.

New Hampshire: Lynch Proposes Constitutional Amendment on School Finance

In his state of the state address and inaugural address on January 4, **New Hampshire Governor John Lynch (D)** called for a constitutional amendment that would allow the state to target school funding to the districts that were most in need. The proposed amendment is the latest effort in an ongoing struggle to solve a school finance system that was first declared unconstitutional in 1993. Most recently, the state Supreme Court rejected a one-year-old funding system that used a statewide property tax to send money to the neediest school districts.

New Hampshire: Lynch Proposes Constitutional Amendment on School Finance

(Continued from p. 5)

Turning to high school reform, Lynch proposed raising the compulsory school attendance age from sixteen to eighteen. “In 1903, the New Hampshire legislature passed a law requiring young people to stay in school until age 16,” he said. “Their goal was to make sure children didn’t leave school without the basic education they needed to get good jobs and live better lives. The world today is very different than it was in 1903. Today a high school diploma is the minimum price of admission for most jobs. Yet 20 percent of our young people are dropping out of high school. These young people will not have the opportunities they deserve.”

In addition, Lynch announced that his budget would fund the expansion of alternative learning programs for high school students who do not do well in traditional classroom settings. He also identified support for “quality early learning, kindergarten and early intervention” as key parts of a long-term strategy to increase the graduation rate.

Governor Lynch’s complete speech is available at <http://www.nh.gov/governor/news/2007/010407.htm>.

South Dakota: Rounds Seeks to Prepare Students for Success After High School

In his state of the state address on January 9, **South Dakota Governor Mike Rounds (R)** announced a new 2010 Education Initiative (2010E), which will include fifty-one separate initiatives for his second term. The 2010E initiative will be divided into three components: Starting Strong, Finishing Strong, and Staying Strong. Respectively, these initiatives include commitments to early childhood education, preparing students for postsecondary education and the global economy, and school funding and teacher quality.

“More and more South Dakota students need to go on to post-secondary education—colleges, universities, technical schools and other advanced training—because when they do that, we have the makings of an excellent workforce for current jobs in South Dakota and also for attracting more higher paying jobs at [*sic*] our state in the future,” he said.

Rounds’s Finishing Strong initiative would create more rigorous graduation requirements, seek to boost the state’s high school graduation rate, increase the use of advanced placement and dual enrollment courses, and create a virtual high school. The end goal is a program that prepares all students for postsecondary education and success in the global economy.

The Staying Strong initiative includes targeted teacher-quality programs that focus on high-quality teachers in high-need and Native American schools and mentoring programs to retain new teachers. Rounds also pledged that he would introduce the Indian Education Act in the upcoming legislative session. He said that the act includes provisions to better train teachers serving Native American students and include Native American culture, language, and history in statewide curricula. He also pledged action to increase the Native American high school graduation rate, which currently sits 23 percent below the statewide rate.

Governor Rounds’s complete speech is available at http://www.state.sd.us/Online%20Docs/state_of_the_state_2006.pdf

Washington: Gregoire Tackles Education System “Built for Yesterday’s Needs”

On January 9, **Washington Governor Christine Gregoire (D)** said that the state’s education system was “built for yesterday’s needs” and used her state of the state address to declare education her top priority in the upcoming legislative session.

“There is no better example [than in education] of where we have held on to a twentieth century system while we face twenty-first century problems,” she said. “We need change when about a third of our students don’t complete high school and about half of our kids aren’t ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.”

Gregoire’s main concerns with secondary schools focused on science, technology, and math education. She noted that about half of Washington’s students failed the tenth-grade math portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning last year. To improve scores, she proposed a twenty-five-student cap on high school math and science class sizes and a streamlined math curriculum aligned to international standards. She also called for better training, recruitment, and mentoring for math and science teachers.

Acknowledging that a high school education might not be enough to find a good job in the future, Gregoire proposed a series of investments in skills-focused initiatives. Among the areas that she listed as priorities were a “running start for the trades,” school-to-work partnerships, and mentoring programs that were geared toward specialized skills needed by the state’s economy.

“A survey of Washington businesses shows that we are not keeping pace with employer needs—especially in fields like computer science, engineering and construction,” she said. “We’re importing workers for good-paying jobs. Don’t you think our sons and daughters should get a shot at those jobs?”

Governor Gregoire’s complete speech is available at <http://www.governor.wa.gov/speeches/speech-view.asp?SpeechSeq=63>.

More State of the State Addresses to Follow

This issue of *Straight A’s* focused on state of the state addresses that occurred during the first few days of January. Please note that not every speech received coverage. A complete list of past and future state of the state addresses scheduled in 2007 is available at <http://www.stateline.org/live/details/story?contentId=163572>.

The February 5 issue of *Straight A’s* will continue to focus on state of the state addresses that include policies and initiatives around high school reform.

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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In this issue:

- NCLB Turns Five: Key Players in Reauthorization Process Celebrate Fifth Anniversary of Landmark Education Law, Begin Discussions on How to Improve It
- Governors Propose High School Reforms in State of the State Addresses: More Rigor, Higher Compulsory Attendance Age Are Popular Solutions
 - **Arizona:** Napolitano Introduces “One Arizona” Initiative
 - **Colorado:** Ritter Highlights Importance of Education to Business Community
 - **Georgia:** Perdue Calls for “Graduation Coaches” in State’s Middle Schools
 - **New Hampshire:** Lynch Proposes Constitutional Amendment on School Finance
 - **South Dakota:** Rounds Seeks to Prepare Students for Success After High School
 - **Washington:** Gregoire Tackles Education System “Built for Yesterday’s Needs”



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