



StraightA's™

Public Education Policy And Progress



“EDUCATING OUR CHILDREN”: *Forbes* Taps Leaders in Business, Government, and Education for New Ideas on Education Reform

Today more than ever, knowledge and innovation are driving successful economies. The key to both is a world-class education. But far too many students—both in America and worldwide—do not have access to the kind of education necessary to compete in the twenty-first century’s global economy. Such is the underlying message of a series of essays recently commissioned by *Forbes* magazine as part of “Solutions: Educating Our Children.”

The twenty essays come from some of the world’s top specialists in business, including **Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corporation**, and **John Chambers, chairman and CEO of Cisco Systems**; government, such as **Representative George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee**, and **U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**; and academia, such as **Michelle Rhee, chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools**. Over half of the essays come from business leaders, particularly those in the technology sector.

In his essay, **Representative Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-CA), the top Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee**, explains why business leaders should be interested in education reform in general and in the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in particular.

“Among the greatest champions for a strong NCLB renewal has been the business community,” McKeon writes in his essay. “Like them, I believe that America’s future success will be measured on a global stage. The innovation and achievement in our boardrooms gives this country a competitive advantage in the global arena, and that same innovation and achievement needs to be fostered in our classrooms. Yet despite this clear-cut need, education reformers and business leaders recognize that today’s students are too often not being equipped with the fundamentals that will ensure a lifetime of learning, creativity and success.”

Indeed, the individuals who represented technology companies, such as Cisco Systems, Intel, and Microsoft, among others, also focus their essays on the need to better prepare the next generation of leaders and workers. Some writers are especially worried about how effectively these future leaders will replace highly qualified technology workers from the baby boom generation who will retire in a few years—especially considering American teenagers’ shortfalls in science in math when compared to their international peers.

“Solutions: Educating Our Children”

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Business Leaders Focus on American Students’ Poor Scores in Math and Science

Chambers notes in his essay, “For many years, our national commitment to education—particularly in the areas of math and science—has lagged behind what is needed to maintain and expand our global leadership in innovation.”

Sharing Chambers’s misgivings about American students’ deficiencies in math and science, **Taylor W. Lawrence, vice president of engineering, technology, and mission assurance for Raytheon Company**, bases much of his essay on his experience with Raytheon’s MathMovesU program, which shows middle school students how math can intersect with their interests, passions, and lead to “cool” careers. “We need to nurture and support students’ math abilities during these critical grades, before negative peer pressure takes hold,” he advises. “We need to provide them with suitable role models and show them the practical application of math in their lives.”

As Lawrence points out, American elementary school students match up well against their international peers in math. However, by the time they reach middle school, less than one third score at the proficient level in math. He blames part of the decline on the stigma associated with math and science and says that even the success of an “ubergeek” like Bill Gates has not reversed this trend.

Chambers argues that without more students choosing math and science careers the nation could lose the edge in innovation that it has enjoyed for decades. “We know we are facing a transition, and we must take this opportunity to provide today’s students with the tools and the thinking that is required for the future,” he writes. “If we miss this transition, we risk losing the innovation that has powered the past decade of economic and technological growth, and we leave an entire generation unprepared to meet and overcome the challenges they will face.”

Government Leaders Focus on Solving the Dropout Crisis

Nationwide, only about 70 percent of American high school students graduate on time with a regular diploma. Among minority students, the percentage is much closer to 50 percent. Such low graduation rates translate into approximately seven thousand students who drop out of high school every school day and over 1.2 million students every year who drop out before earning a high school diploma.

In his essay, **U.S. Senator Michael Enzi, the top Republican on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee**, calls the dropout crisis “one of the most pressing problems in our education system today.” He also asserts that too many students who do graduate discover that they have to spend their first years of college taking “frustrating, remedial coursework on subjects they should have learned in high school.” Acknowledging that a high school diploma alone is usually not enough to prepare students for the high-skill, high-paying jobs of the twenty-first century, Enzi calls on Congress to help reduce rising college costs and to ensure that every student has access to lifelong learning opportunities.

Secretary Spellings focuses her essay on students who are most likely to drop out—those from poor and minority households. “We’re only getting half of our minority kids out of high school on time, while 90 percent of the fastest-growing jobs require post-secondary education,” she writes. “Let that sink in for a moment. It is untenable, unsustainable and no good.” Spellings adds that the increases in minority student enrollment have changed the face of America and have brought the nation to a “critical” moment. “It’s uncomfortable. It ought to be uncomfortable. Half of our minority kids get out of school on time. If we don’t have discomfort or anxiety about that, shame on us.”

But why do so many poor and minority students drop out? As Michelle Rhee writes, it is not because they suffer from an insufficient capacity to learn. Instead, she blames any disparities between their performance and that of their more affluent peers not on the students, but instead on the adults in the education system. “I know first-hand from speaking and working with our children that our poor and minority students have potential and ability that rivals anyone,” she writes. “You can tell when you meet them, when you talk to them, when you hear their stories. Our students aren’t achieving, not because of their aptitude, but because we, as the adults in this system, are not doing our jobs to serve them well.” As part of her plan for change in the DC schools, she proposes a smaller bureaucracy, increased incentives for teachers—including pay-for-performance—and increased support for struggling schools.

In discussing the importance of the most important adults in the education system—teachers—**Craig R. Barrett, chairman of Intel**, also weaves in the themes of competitiveness and math and science education that he shares with his colleagues in the technology industry.

“When I look at education in the U.S., I see a declining K–12 system that is losing competitiveness,” he writes. “One of the most serious issues is the shortage of well-qualified teachers, which is forcing many school districts to hire uncertified or underqualified people. This is especially crippling in math and science—two fields critical to future economic development.”

In his essay, Bill Gates asserts that too few children worldwide have access to a quality education. He explains how technology is bringing brilliant teachers, innovative lesson plans, and other high-quality education resources to people around the globe. As an example, he cites the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s (MIT) OpenCourseWare initiative, which makes lecture notes, exams, and other resources available online for more than 1,800 MIT classes and online communities that allow teachers to share ideas, lesson plans, and content over the Internet.

Gates also acknowledges that technology is only one part of the solution. “There are significant social, cultural, and institutional challenges that must be overcome as well,” he writes. “Technology must be implemented as part of a thoughtful, holistic approach to education transformation that includes teacher training, relevant curricula, parental involvement, and programs for children that fill unmet needs for basics like nutrition and health care.”

With so many influential leaders from business, education, and the government in agreement that education is the key to the nation’s economic future, what else could be needed to implement the changes needed to move the country toward effective educational reform? Miller provides an

answer in the last sentence of his essay: “These are significant challenges, but with the political will, we can address them.”

Rhee agrees. She writes, “When political will backs the innovative practices and courage needed for reform, it absolutely is possible to turn around a school system.”

The complete collection of essays is available at http://www.forbes.com/2008/01/23/solutions-education-teaching-oped-cx_hpm_0123solutionsland.html.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Even in Tight Budget Environments, Governors Continue to Stress the Importance of Education

As governors make their state of the state addresses, they continue to stress the importance of education to their states. However, in the tight budget environment that accompanies an economic downturn, governors must often choose between continuing the positive momentum that they have made in education reform and focusing their energy (and money) on closing widening budget deficits. In some cases, they have decided to do both.

Arizona: Napolitano Calls Education the “Most Important Chapter for Our Future”

On January 14, **Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano (D)** kicked off her state of the state address by asking legislators to build on their past work and keep the momentum going, “even as we confront the challenges of our current budget.” Calling education the “most important chapter for our future,” the governor expounded upon Arizona’s recent educational accomplishments: expanded access to all-day kindergarten, increased investment in teacher pay, early childhood education, financial aid, and higher expectations and standards which require more math and science in high school.

Building on these achievements, Napolitano proposed changing testing to match graduation standards “to make sure we’re testing for the right things, at the right times, and for the right reasons.” She renewed last year’s request for lawmakers to require students to stay in high school until they graduate or turn eighteen.

“It’s time to end the fiction that a high school diploma is the final goal of education or that a student should be allowed to drop out at the age of sixteen,” she said. “An Arizona diploma should demonstrate that a student is fully prepared for higher education, whether in a technical or vocational setting, a community college, or university.”

Napolitano also called for a Centennial Scholars program, which would guarantee free tuition at any Arizona higher learning institution for any student who stays out of trouble and maintains at least a “B” average during high school. “Rewarding students who are excelling is a good step,” she said, “but we must recognize that higher education is something that all Arizona children will need to succeed. It’s a pathway to prosperity and, in Arizona, it’s also supposed to be affordable.” The governor also proposed to double the number of bachelor’s degrees by 2020 and to create a fixed tuition for four years when a student begins school at an Arizona university.

Reminding her constituents that 15 percent of Arizona’s students come from families who don’t speak English, Napolitano discussed the need to allocate more funding toward helping English language learners. She remarked, “These students must learn to read, write, and speak in English as soon as possible. I put this challenge to the legislative leadership: take our tax dollars out of court and put them back in the classroom, where they belong.” In addition, the governor discussed the need to expand teacher loan forgiveness, scholarships, and incentives, as well as to fund more math and science teachers.

Governor Napolitano’s complete speech is available at http://www.azgovernor.gov/media/sos_08.asp.

Mississippi: Barbour Plans to “Live Within Our Means” but Continues to Propose New Education Reforms

Saying that education was the “number one economic development issue in [the] state and the number one quality of life issue,” **Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour (R)** introduced some new education proposals in his state of the state address on January 21. But he also spoke about the “softening” national economy, troubles in financial markets, and the credit crunch and how it could impact Mississippi’s budget.

Barbour said, “Our duty is to live within our means...to pass an honest balanced budget and particularly this year to protect our strengthening rainy day fund.”

At the same time, Barbour called education his “top priority” and reminded lawmakers of past increases for education, both in K–12 and higher education. “This year our K–12 schools are receiving more than \$4.2 billion from state, federal and local sources. . . more than \$8,500 for every child attending our public schools compared to \$6,800 per child just four years ago,” he said. He also talked about record increases for higher education over the past four years and said he was in favor of “continued, large increases in funding” for higher education. But, both times, Barbour stressed that the current budget environment would not allow for increases in education funding of the same magnitude as in the past.

He did say that his budget would fully fund the Mississippi Adequate Education Plan, a program designed to ensure that each school district receives enough money to meet midlevel accreditation standards. First enacted in 1997, the program was fully funded only during 2003 and 2007—both state election years.

Barbour also pledged to continue to support the state superintendent’s proposal to redesign high school to reduce the dropout rate and make high school more rigorous and relevant to kids who might not be thinking about college. He also proposed a salary increase for teachers with more than twenty-five years of experience and called for a new program for beginning teachers.

“For our beginning teachers, we need to give them more support as they learn to manage a classroom full of kids,” he said. “We lose a third of our new teachers within three years. As my Teacher Advisory Council has told me, more young teachers leave teaching because of discipline issues than over teacher pay. Every new teacher in our schools should have an experienced

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teacher serving as a mentor, and we should pay that mentor an extra \$1,000 for this valuable service. It is more than worth it.”

Barbour’s complete speech is available at
<http://www.governorbarbour.com/speeches/2008SOS.htm>.

Missouri: Blunt Focuses on Preparing Students to Compete on a Global Level

In his state of the state address on January 15, **Missouri Governor Matt Blunt (R)** identified education as his top budget priority. He recommended boosting funding at all levels of education, including a \$121 million increase for elementary and secondary schools. He also proposed allocating \$125 million for A+ and Access Missouri Programs.

“The funding recommendations in my budget will provide our schools, teachers, and students with significant resources to be successful now and in the future. Unlike in the past, we will not leave our schools, teachers, or students scraping for leftovers.”

After reflecting upon recent accomplishments, including the expansion of the Advanced Placement (AP) program, Blunt proposed continuing to go forward by appropriating \$750,000 to train one thousand new AP teachers and help six thousand students take AP tests and \$5 million to create technologically advanced classrooms.

“To ensure that the next generation enjoys even greater prosperity, we must provide our students with a world-class education in these subjects. We want our students to do more than merely keep up with their peers in other states and other countries. We want them to lead the world.”

Blunt also proposed spending \$1.1 million for afterschool programs “which help students stay fit, stay safe, and stay out of trouble.”

Governor Blunt’s complete speech is available at
http://gov.missouri.gov/State_of_the_State_2008.htm.

Delaware: Minner Seeks to Make College More Affordable

In her state of the state address on January 17, **Delaware Governor Ruth Ann Minner (D)** outlined several educational initiatives she wants to accomplish in the coming year. She proposed enacting legislation to create the Student Academic Record (STAR) scholarship, which would enable high-achieving SEED (Student Excellence Equals Degree) graduates to continue on to a four-year, tuition-free bachelor’s degree. Currently, the SEED scholarship program enables students who stay out of trouble and do well in high school to go to college to earn an associate degree at no cost to them.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for our students and would result in a better educated workforce for our business community,” she said.

As a continued show of support for the efforts of the Vision 2015 group, an education-focused organization of business leaders, educators, and state officials, Minner echoed its recommendation to dedicate \$500,000 to continue to invest in early childhood education and \$250,000 to make the virtual school a reality.

Minner also noted the state's many successes in education over the past seven years. Specifically, she highlighted the addition of reading specialists in every elementary school and math specialists in every middle school, higher National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, Delaware's recognition as one of the top four states progressing toward closing the achievement gap, the formation of the SEED scholarship program, and the implementation of the Delaware Performance Appraisal System in every district by next school year.

Governor Minner's complete speech is available at http://governor.delaware.gov/speeches/2008_state_of_the_state.shtml.

Hawaii: Lingle Focuses on STEM Issues

In her state of the state address on January 22, **Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle (D)** lauded Hawaii's accomplishments in education over the past year. She highlighted the statewide program to increase the global education of Hawaii's teachers, students, and residents, the creation of academies in middle and high schools that focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and their statewide involvement in a hands-on robotics program. The governor then recognized students and educators involved in these projects.

"These young people and their adult mentors are an inspiration to me in the fearless way they are embracing their future," she said. "Their enthusiasm makes me optimistic about our state's future."

Turning her focus to higher education, the governor called on the state legislature to pass tax deductions of up to \$20,000 a year for parents or other family members saving for a child's college education. In addition, she proposed the creation of a Commission on Higher Education made up of the presidents of Hawaii's major universities, members of the community, and business leaders. The role of the commission will be to envision new ways of using federal and state education dollars.

Governor Lingle's complete speech is available at: <http://hawaii.gov/gov/leg/2008-session/state-of-the-state>.

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.



1201 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 901
Washington, DC 20036

Phone 202 828-0828
Fax 202 828-0821
Alliance@all4ed.org
www.all4ed.org

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Bob Wise
President

Jason Amos
Editor

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