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Public Education Policy And Progress



## **“IMPROVING THE DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS IN LOW-PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS”: Alliance Brief and Event Examine How to Recruit and Retain Effective Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools**

The inequitable distribution of teachers is one of the major problems facing low-performing schools that serve large numbers of poor and minority students. Typically, teachers in these schools lack the experience, qualifications, effectiveness, or length of service needed to succeed in the classroom. These were a few of the key messages that came out of an April 10 forum convened by the Alliance for Excellent Education and sponsored by the MetLife Foundation.

The key to solving the distribution problem at the high school level is to act comprehensively, by significantly increasing the supply of teacher candidates where shortages exist, improving the recruitment and hiring process, and retaining effective teachers in low-performing high schools. So says “Improving the Distribution of Teachers in Low-performing High Schools,” a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education that was released at the event.

As explained at the release event by **Jeremy Ayers, a policy and advocacy associate at the Alliance for Excellent Education and author of the brief**, having an ineffective teacher for a single academic year can equate to a student’s loss of more than a full year of standardized achievement. Conversely, having several effective teachers in a row can repair past damage and substantially increase student achievement. Unfortunately, attracting effective teachers to low-performing schools—especially high schools—is a daunting task because high school teachers’ subject-specific knowledge and training in areas such as mathematics or biology put them in a better position to choose alternate careers.

One way to ensure a more equitable distribution of effective teachers in low-performing schools, Ayers noted, is to grow the numbers of good teachers in the profession. The bulk of the work to increase the pool of effective teachers falls to teacher preparation programs because the majority of new teachers emerge from these programs. Ayers suggested that these institutions start recruiting students with academic promise more aggressively into education programs—especially those majoring in science, technology, engineering, and math. He added that alternative route programs, such as Teach for America and the New York City Teaching Fellows, can also help enlarge the pool of teaching applicants by drawing promising, nontraditional candidates into teaching. Nevertheless, he cautioned that teachers with alternative certification do not stay in teaching as long as teachers from traditional programs coming into the profession.

## **Improving the Distribution of Teachers in Low-Performing High Schools** (Continued from p. 1)

Compounding the supply issue, low-performing school districts have particular difficulty recruiting and hiring good candidates. However, as explained by **Dr. Barbara Jenkins, chief of staff of the Orange County (FL) Public School District**, this difficulty should not be blamed on a lack of individuals who want to teach high-need, low-achievement children. Rather, she noted that a lengthy, bureaucratic hiring process often delays decisions.

The brief suggests that, in order to speed up the hiring process and enhance teacher recruitment, districts set measurable hiring goals, and make timely decisions. Some strategies that districts and schools should consider instituting include user-friendly job banks, early notification of vacancies, and budget timelines that allow schools to make offers before the summer.

One popular idea to attract teachers to low-performing schools is increased teacher pay, but according to the brief, extra pay—on its own—is not enough to draw and *keep* top-notch teachers into struggling schools. “While supplying low-performing or high-need high schools with effective teachers is undoubtedly important, this strategy alone will do little good if the teachers do not remain in the schools to which they have been recruited, and if they are not supported by working conditions, induction, professional development, and career paths that improve their ability to help students achieve,” the brief reads.

As panelists pointed out, poor working conditions often drive effective teachers away after only a few years, even when low-performing schools are able to recruit and hire them. **Dr. Barnett Berry, president and CEO of the Center for Teaching Quality**, stressed the importance of collecting data on teacher working conditions. “There are vast differences between teacher perceptions in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. And even more variations inside high schools than across high schools,” he explained.

Conversely, better-quality working conditions, such as safety, availability of resources, time for collaboration, and positive relationships between principals and school leaders not only decrease teacher turnover, they also lead to better student achievement. By focusing on improving working conditions at the school site, policymakers can help schools to improve retention.

Comprehensive teacher induction is also crucial to retaining teachers. According to the brief, these programs can cut turnover rates in half and rapidly improve teaching skills. The brief also lists other ways to improve the distribution of effective teachers, such as regular professional development, teacher collaboration, and career ladders for experienced and effective teachers. **Wesley G. Williams II, director of the Office of Educator Equity in the Ohio Department of Education**, seconded the importance of career ladders and explained how Ohio has successfully recruited teachers by offering them job support and the opportunity to advance.

Turning to federal policy recommendations for improving teacher distribution, the panelists agreed on the importance of data to improving teacher distribution and student achievement. **Tim Daly, president of the New Teacher Project**, said that it would be interesting to begin collecting data on how student behavior, such as student attendance, varies by school teacher.

**Dr. Jane West, vice president for government relations at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education** said what the teacher is doing in the classroom should also be analyzed in order to determine how well preparation programs are preparing teacher candidates.

Currently, many states lack the capacity to collect and analyze such data. To remedy this problem, the brief suggests that the federal government strengthen and expand the \$50 million Statewide Data Systems program. It adds that although state and district policies wield most of the influence over teacher distribution, federal policymakers must play a crucial role in supporting and ensuring comprehensive recruitment, retention, and improvement strategies at the state and local levels. Other recommendations include encouraging teacher preparation programs to recruit and prepare more and better teaching candidates, holding states accountable for reporting and acting on teacher distribution problems, and using federal funds to improve teaching.

The brief, as well as audio and video from the release event, is available at [http://www.all4ed.org/events/distributionteachers\\_lowperformingHSs](http://www.all4ed.org/events/distributionteachers_lowperformingHSs).

### **AT&T Announces \$100 Million Effort to Address High School Success and Workforce Readiness**

On April 17, AT&T announced the launch of AT&T Aspire, a four-year, \$100 million program that will help strengthen student success and workforce readiness. The program is the largest education initiative in AT&T's history and one of the largest corporate investments in high school success and workforce readiness.

"In the U.S., 1.2 million students drop out of high school every year," said **AT&T Chairman and CEO Randall Stephenson**. "AT&T Aspire is about supporting the great work already underway to help our kids succeed in school, and helping students see the connection between education and their best future."

A key part of the initiative is a job shadowing program that will reach 100,000 students over the next five years. By pairing AT&T employees with students in grades nine through twelve, the program will allow students to see firsthand the kinds of skills that are necessary to succeed in the workforce.

The initiative will also provide grants to schools and nonprofit organizations that are focused on helping students graduate from high school and become better prepared for college and the workforce. It will also provide support for one hundred community dropout prevention summits that were announced earlier this month by America's Promise. (More information on the summits is available at [http://www.all4ed.org/publication\\_material/straight\\_as/04072008](http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/straight_as/04072008).) The initiative's final component is a research effort that will focus on the perspectives of teachers and school administrators on the high school dropout crisis. It will also examine why students drop out and identify the barriers to keeping more students engaged and on track to graduate.

More information on the program is available at <http://www.att.com/gen/press-room?pid=2631>.



### **"EVERY STUDENT COUNTS": New Alliance Policy Brief Makes the Case for Graduation Rate Accountability**

In passing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, Congress acknowledged the importance of addressing the significant achievement gaps between students of differing racial, ethnic, economic, and linguistic backgrounds. However, in the years since the law's enactment, it has become obvious that inequities continue to exist in and between schools, districts, and states across the country. Of special concern to "Every Student Counts: The Case for Graduation Rate

## **Every Student Counts** (Continued from p. 3)

Accountability,” a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education, is NCLB’s failure to address a key measure of a successful school: its graduation rate.

Under NCLB, high schools must annually assess students in at least one grade in reading and math and track their graduation rates. However, misleading, inconsistent definitions and poor implementation have severely undermined the accuracy of graduation rates, making the indicator effectively useless in determining the success of a high school. As a result, the graduation rates that are publicly reported and used for accountability purposes do not reflect actual student outcomes. The brief notes that, in fact, the graduation rates that states report for NCLB accountability are, on average, 11 percentage points higher than independent estimates. In some cases, the difference is as high as 30 percentage points.

Nor does NCLB hold schools, districts, or states accountable for meaningfully improving graduation rates, in contrast to its strong emphasis on improving test scores. While the law requires states to set a graduation rate target for 2014 and to establish interim goals to be met along the way, the brief points out that weak accountability requirements have allowed states to set graduation rate goals as low as 50 percent. “Clearly, it was not the law’s intention that every child should become proficient by 2014 while only half the students graduate,” the brief reads.

Additionally, the brief notes that the law’s “safe harbor” provision lowers the graduation rate bar even further by allowing schools that miss their target to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), thus meeting federal accountability requirements by demonstrating a certain amount of improvement in their rate. However, these state-set goals are almost universally insignificant. As the brief points out, high schools in thirty-eight states can achieve safe harbor by improving graduation rates by just 0.1 percentage point or less a year; high schools in three states can meet their accountability obligations without making any graduation rate improvement at all.

Another problem with NCLB’s graduation rate accountability, according to the brief, is that, unlike with test scores, NCLB does not hold schools accountable for improving the graduation rates of each subgroup of students. As the brief notes, “High schools can make AYP—thereby avoiding negative consequences—despite a consistent, or even a growing, graduation gap between high-performing and low-performing student groups.” It points out that this loophole can create “perverse incentives” for schools to focus resources on the few students whose improved performance and attainment will allow the school to achieve the average graduation rate goal while ignoring the dropout rates of subgroups.

To combat these problems, the brief offers recommendations on how Congress can use the reauthorization of NCLB to ensure that the students with the greatest needs are adequately served and that the unintended consequences of the law’s weak graduation rate accountability provisions are corrected. First, it calls on Congress to “implement consistent and accurate calculations of graduation rates to ensure comparability and transparency.” Second, it says that NCLB reauthorization should require “aggressive, attainable, and uniform annual growth requirements as part of AYP to ensure a minimum, consistent increase in graduation rates” and require disaggregation for the reporting and accountability of graduation rates. Finally, it says that graduation rates and assessments should be given equal weight in AYP determinations so

that “schools have balanced incentives to ensure that their students graduate and to raise their test scores, instead of doing one at the expense of the other.”

“The current system stresses testing while neglecting the essential measurement of whether or not students are actually graduating,” says **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “I urge Secretary Spellings to incorporate the four principles presented in the Alliance’s brief as she develops regulations on graduation rates. These same principles must be taken into account by Congress, as well, as it works on the No Child Left Behind Act.”

The complete brief is available at [http://www.all4ed.org/files/ESA\\_GradRateAcct.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/ESA_GradRateAcct.pdf).

### **U.S. Department of Education Proposes Updates to Student Privacy Law; Decision Could Impact Data Collection at All Levels**

The sensitive issue of protecting student privacy made headlines last month when the U.S. Department of Education (ED) proposed updates to the federal student privacy law known as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

FERPA was enacted in 1974 to limit the disclosure of student records and protect students’ privacy. Since that time, the emergence of state longitudinal data systems, which can manage large data sets securely, and the demand for better research and analysis have created new questions for state and local education officials and education researchers related to student data and privacy.

The Data Quality Campaign (DQC), a national collaborative effort to encourage and support state policymakers to improve the collection, availability, and use of education data, summarized some of these issues in its brief, “Maximizing the Power of Education Data while Ensuring Compliance with Federal Student Privacy Laws.” As it explains, “Policymakers, educators and researchers need statewide longitudinal data systems capable of providing timely, valid and relevant data.” It also addresses some of the potential problems with FERPA, such as whether the act permits schools and local educational agencies, without parental consent, to provide students’ education records to a statewide longitudinal data system, and whether state data systems are permitted to redisclose those student records to research organizations or schools.

There has been widespread frustration with both the lack of clarity from ED on how to reconcile this and other new dynamics with the current law and, in some cases, with ED’s narrow interpretations of the law that some believe have negatively affected efforts to improve data collection, reporting, and use. As the DQC’s April newsletter notes, “The results have been federal policies unnecessarily at war with themselves; a serious chilling effect on the development and use of robust state data systems; and the persistence of widespread misunderstanding of FERPA.”

Although the proposed regulations include some positive changes, there are a number of areas that appear to need additional clarification or additions. Such areas include provisions related to state data systems entering into research agreements with third parties, sharing of data between K–12 and postsecondary data systems, and sharing data with social service and employment agencies.

Stakeholders have the opportunity to weigh in on these issues by providing formal comments to the U.S. Department of Education by May 8. In addition, on Wednesday, April 23, the DQC will be hosting a webinar to review the regulations and proposed comments to address these and other concerns.

For more information about FERPA and the upcoming webinar, visit the DQC’s website at [http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/policy\\_implication/ferpa.cfm](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/policy_implication/ferpa.cfm).



## EVALUATING THE CLASS OF 2005: One Third of Massachusetts College Students Need Remediation; Percentages Much Higher for Low-income and Minority Students

Of the approximately 57,000 students who graduated from Massachusetts high schools in 2005, more than 19,000 (33 percent) enrolled in a Massachusetts public postsecondary institution in Fall 2005. However, the *Massachusetts School-to-College Report: High School Class of 2005*, reveals that more than 7,000 of those students (37 percent) had to enroll in at least one remedial course during their first semester in college. The report, conducted jointly by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, represents the first-ever study detailing the performance of the state's high school graduates who attend a public college or university in Massachusetts.

"This is data we've never had before, and will be vitally important as we move into this next phase of education reform," said **Jeffrey Nellhaus, Massachusetts' acting education commissioner**. "Our graduates should enter college well prepared, not in need of remedial help. These local reports will give our schools the information they need to make sure this trend does not continue."

When examining the data, broken down by student subgroups, the report's authors found that low-income and minority students were more likely to take at least one remedial course than their white peers. Specifically, one third of white and Asian and Pacific Islander students enrolled in a remedial course, versus 59 percent of African Americans and 58 percent of Hispanics. In addition, 52 percent of low-income students and 50 percent of limited English proficient students took at least one remedial course. The report also finds that students in community colleges (65 percent) are far more likely to need remediation than students who enroll at a state university (8 percent) or a state college (22 percent).

One possible indicator of whether a student will need remediation is his or her performance on the tenth grade Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test. As indicated in the table below, students who scored higher on the MCAS in English language arts (MCAS ELA) or math were less likely to enroll in remedial courses.

MCAS Mathematics Performance Level	Percentage Enrolled in Developmental Math
Advanced	4%
Proficient	20%
Needs Improvement	50%
MCAS ELA Performance Level	Percentage Enrolled in Developmental Reading
Advanced	0%
Proficient	4%
Needs Improvement	28%

Using new database that links public K–12 and higher education data, the report's authors were also able to determine which high schools do the best (and worst) jobs of preparing their graduates for college. The range varied dramatically, from Boston Latin, where only 1 percent of graduates who enrolled in college took a remedial course, to Springfield High School, where 100 percent of the school's graduates who enrolled in college needed remediation.

“These reports will be critical as we move toward our goal of better aligning the work of our secondary school with that of our colleges,” said **Paul Reville, chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education**. “This information should prompt our secondary schools to re-evaluate whether they are properly preparing their graduates for college.”

The complete report, as well as a link to local school reports, is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.asp?id=4043>.

### **Call for Presenters: Alliance Seeks Individuals to Present on Preparing Students for College and Work**

The Alliance for Excellent Education is currently accepting proposals for its popular achievement forum series, which highlights successful practices in middle and high school education. This year’s topic is “Preparing All Students for College and Work.” In the past, these forums have routinely attracted about 150 people per session and offer the opportunity for policymakers, educators, researchers, advocates, the media, and others to learn about the most promising practices in middle and high school education that prepare all students for college and work.

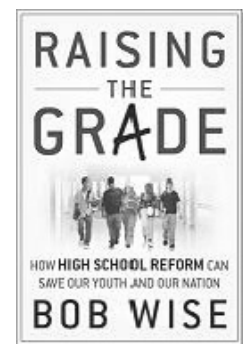
The Alliance welcomes proposals on any topic, program, or initiative related to middle and high school reform that ensures students are college- and work-ready when they graduate, including those at the school, district, or state levels. Proposals not focused on secondary-level initiatives that promote college and work readiness will not be considered.

The deadline to submit a proposal is **Monday, May 12, 2008**. Selections and dates for the achievement series will be announced in June. Additional information on this year’s forums, including directions on how to submit a proposal and topics of particular interest, is available at [http://www.all4ed.org/events/2008\\_HSachievement\\_series](http://www.all4ed.org/events/2008_HSachievement_series).

### **New Book by Alliance President Available for Pre-order**

*Raising the Grade: How High School Reform Can Save Our Youth and Our Nation*, written by Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, describes the alarming cost of the high school crisis and informs citizens, educators, and policymakers about what they can do to ensure that all students receive a quality high school education that prepares them for a successful future.

Every year, approximately 1.2 million students fail to graduate from high school. In *Raising the Grade*, Governor Wise delves into how the dropout crisis affects every American. To make the case for an overhaul of the nation’s high schools, he combines lessons learned from his twenty-plus years as an elected official with stories of real Americans whose high school experiences failed to adequately prepare them for work or college.



More information on the book, including ordering information, is available at <http://www.all4ed.org>.

***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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