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Public Education Policy And Progress



## **HOUSE BEGINS WORK ON FY 2010 APPROPRIATIONS: Subcommittee Shoots Down Obama Proposal to Shift Title I Funds to School Improvement**

On July 10, the House Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education Appropriations Subcommittee began work on a Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 appropriations bill by the same name that funds the U.S. Department of Education. As reported out of the committee, FY 2010 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill would provide \$64.7 billion in discretionary funding for the U.S. Department of Education.

**Representative Dave Obey (D-WI), chairman of the House Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee and full House Appropriations Committee**, acknowledged that drafting the bill was a “challenging task” and “will not make everyone happy.” In what Obey called “one of the most difficult issues” before the subcommittee, a decision was made not to fund President Obama’s proposal to shift \$1.5 billion out of Title I funding and into Early Childhood Grants (\$500 million) and School Improvement Grants (\$1 billion). Instead, the subcommittee left Title I funding unchanged at \$14.5 billion, the same amount it received in FY 2009. The subcommittee’s decision was not a complete surprise as **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** had faced pointed questions on the proposal in [appearances before the House and Senate Appropriations Committees last month](#).

Obey noted that the appropriations bill would maintain base funding of \$545 million for School Improvement Grants and, when combined with the money for the program in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, would represent “an unprecedented \$4 billion for these grants that target assistance to the approximately 13,000 low-performing schools.” He added that providing even larger sums in a single year “would simply outstrip the ability of states and districts to use the funds effectively and wisely.”

Under the Obama proposal, the extra \$1 billion for School Improvement Grants came with a caveat that states would have to ensure that 40 percent of the funds were spent on improvement activities in middle and high schools. According to an FY 2010 budget summary provided by the U.S. Department of Education, this caveat reflects the administration’s “determination to take immediate action to begin addressing the factors that contribute to the high school dropout crisis in American education.”

In a May 7 conference call with education reporters, Duncan said that Title I is not focused enough on “fundamentally reducing the dropout rate and challenging the status quo and those dropout factors.” He said a priority was to make sure that middle and high schools get their “fair

share of these desperately needed resources,” adding that “focusing not just on the younger children, but on middle school and high school is hugely important to us.”

A chief example of schools that are not serving their students are the nation’s “dropout factories,” the approximately two thousand high schools—identified by Johns Hopkins University researchers—that graduate 60 percent or fewer of each entering ninth-grade class.

In a statement in response to the subcommittee’s action, **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, called dropout factories the “low-hanging fruit in the effort to boost the national graduation rate,” adding that those schools account for less than 15 percent of the nation’s high schools, yet produce more than half of the nation’s dropouts and nearly 75 percent of minority dropouts.

“While I understand the subcommittee’s desire to restore another \$1 billion for Title I rather than fund the School Improvement Grants,” Wise said, “the unfortunate reality is that little Title I funding will reach the high schools that are in desperate need of additional resources. Currently, only about 10 percent of Title I dollars go to high schools.”

Although the subcommittee chose not to fund Obama’s proposal to shift Title I funds, it did provide funding for a number of his other education reforms. For example, the bill would provide \$50 million for a High School Graduation Initiative, which would provide grants to school districts to support effective, sustainable, and coordinated strategies that will increase high school graduation rates, particularly in dropout factories—and their feeder schools. It would also provide over \$400 million for new approaches to improve reading, including \$111 million for the Striving Readers program, which focuses on improving the literacy skills of adolescent students who read below grade level.

“The nation’s middle and high school students made great headway from the subcommittee’s decision to provide over \$400 million for literacy priorities, including \$111 for the Striving Readers program, as well as the decision to provide \$50 million for a high school dropout prevention initiative,” Wise said. “This is an important down payment on dealing with the dropout crisis that must be expanded in future legislative action.”

The bill would also provide \$446 million for the Teacher Incentive Fund, which would go to states and school districts that want to reward effective teachers and schools for boosting student achievement; \$868 million for TRIO, and \$330 million for GEAR UP, which represents an increase of \$20 million and \$17 million, respectively.

The full House Appropriations Committee is scheduled to consider the subcommittee’s bill during the week of July 17, with the bill possibly moving to the House floor before the August recess. More information on the FY 2010 Labor–HHS–Education appropriations bill is available at [http://appropriations.house.gov/Subcommittees/sub\\_lhhse.shtml](http://appropriations.house.gov/Subcommittees/sub_lhhse.shtml).

Wise’s complete press statement is available at [http://www.all4ed.org/press\\_room/press\\_releases/07102009](http://www.all4ed.org/press_room/press_releases/07102009).



## **MOVING BEYOND AYP: New Alliance Policy Brief Calls for More Sophisticated Indicators to Determine Why Schools are Low-Performing**

A new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education says the nation must move away from solely relying on test scores and graduation rates to evaluate high schools if it is to successfully stem the high school dropout crisis and prepare all students for college and careers. Instead, the brief, *Moving Beyond AYP: High School Performance Indicators*, calls for the use of more sophisticated indicators that can determine the factors that contribute to a school's poor performance, guide the development of improvement strategies, and measure interim progress along the way.

"The 'check engine' light on your car tells you that you need to look under the hood, but it can't tell you which specific part you need to replace," said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education. "Similarly, test scores and graduation rates can identify problem schools, but they can't tell you why they're low-performing. It's time to move from simply looking underneath the hood to fixing the problem."

According to the brief, national leaders and the education policy community have embraced the idea that the education system must establish college and career readiness as the goal for all students. There also has been widespread acknowledgement that addressing the problems in low-performing high schools is necessary if that goal is to be met. But, as education stakeholders look ahead to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there is almost-universal consensus that the current federal accountability and school improvement systems need to be redesigned, infused with more and better data, and tailored to meet the individual needs of schools and students.

Under current law, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is used to measure how well schools are educating their students, but, according to the brief, it is not an effective tool for doing so at the high school level. For example, students' proficiency in high school is gauged by how well they perform on state tests that often measure basic skills, not whether students are prepared for college and careers. Additionally, the rules for determining AYP have not included a consistent method for calculating graduation rates, considerations for the graduation rates of student subgroups, or requirements that graduation rates must increase meaningfully over time.

"In many ways, the current law whetted the nation's appetite for education data by requiring the reporting of annual test information, and doing so at the subgroup level," the brief states. "Now, educators, policymakers, and the public are eager for indicators that both better reflect the national goal of graduating all students ready for college and careers and help educators plan and implement strategies for getting them there."

The brief envisions a new approach for how indicators can be used for high school accountability and school improvement. Under the new approach, AYP would be beefed up to include commonly calculated, accurate graduation rates and high-quality assessments based on common standards that measure college and career readiness. Only then could AYP truly determine whether high schools are meeting their ultimate goal of graduating every student prepared for college, careers, and life in the twenty-first century. At the same time, the beefed-up AYP would

be accompanied by additional data that more clearly describes the challenges schools face, drives school improvement efforts, and recognizes progress toward established goals. Such a system, the brief says, would better illustrate high schools' progress, trigger incentives or improvement actions, and inform decisionmaking.

“A school would continue to be considered low performing if had not met its ultimate goals as measured through AYP,” the brief reads. “However, by making progress on the other school performance indicators, a school would demonstrate that its current improvement strategies were positively influencing progress in the school, and were more than likely to lead to improved test scores and graduation rates. These signs of success would motivate school staff and students to continue their hard work, and guard schools from being subjected to a new improvement plan.”

The brief argues that this new approach should rely on performance indicators that research has shown are predictive of high school graduation and college and career readiness. It outlines several indicators that fit these criteria, including attendance, course success, on-track-to-graduation status, course-taking patterns, success on college- and career-ready assessments, postsecondary success rates, and school climate. It also describes the research behind these indicators, measurement options and challenges, and current use across the nation.

However, as the brief notes, embedding these additional indicators into the high school accountability and school improvement process raises a number of issues that policymakers will need to address. Specifically, they must define how indicators will work together; understand the relationships between indicators in order to avoid unintended consequences; decide how annual progress goals will be measured; build the technical infrastructure to define, collect, and report more data elements; and build educators' capacity to use high school performance indicators and transform raw data into actionable knowledge.

The brief argues that federal policymakers can help leverage action at the state and local levels to improve teaching, learning, and student outcomes by embracing indicators of college and career readiness and embedding actionable high school performance indicators into the accountability and school improvement system. Specifically, it calls on federal policymakers to:

- establish graduation and college and career readiness as the goal for all students and high schools;
- improve national indicators for measuring college- and career-ready graduation;
- reinvent accountability and school improvement to include multiple high school performance indicators;
- invest in state and local systems to collect, analyze, and communicate data, including high school performance indicators;
- build the capacity of educators and education leaders to use high school performance indicators; and
- invest in research activities to inform the use of various high school performance indicators.

The brief is available for download at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/SPIMovingBeyondAYP.pdf>.

## Ask the Experts: *National Journal* Launches Education Expert Blog

Last month, *National Journal* launched an education blog that features more than seventy of the leading experts in the education policy world. Every Monday, blog moderator **Lisa Caruso, who covers education, immigration, and transportation for *National Journal***, posts a new question for the panel of experts, which includes current U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, past secretaries **Margaret Spellings** and **Rod Paige**, **U.S. Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO)**, and **U.S. Representatives Tim Bishop (D-NY)**, **Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ)**, **Dale Kildee (D-MI)**, **John Kline (R-MN)**, and **Donald Payne (D-NJ)**.

During the first week of the blog, panelists discussed the best use of stimulus money and largely agreed with Secretary Duncan that the money should be used to avoid cuts in education, but should also be used to invest in reforms that will “pay dividends decades into the future.” At the same time, the panelists asked thought-provoking questions about how the Race to the Top funds will be awarded and whether states will be able to enact fundamental and positive change with them.

During the second week of the blog, panelists were asked whether mayoral control is the answer for urban schools. Responses ranged from the opinion that mayoral control was yet another educational fad, to the belief that mayoral control had promise but is not a silver bullet. This week, the experts were asked how colleges can help graduates pursue a career.

Access the blog and see the complete list of participants at <http://education.nationaljournal.com/>.



## ***PREPARING STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER: New Alliance Issue Brief Examines Elements Behind California’s Multiple Pathways Approach***

The traditional American high school has long represented a critical decision point at which students must choose to pursue college or a career. Yet there is growing recognition that to best serve students and society, today’s high schools must shift their focus from preparing for college *or* career to ensuring that students are ready for college *and* career. So says *Preparing Students for College and Career: California Multiple Pathways*, a new issue brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education that examines how California’s multiple pathways approach combines rigorous college preparation with workplace exposure in an effort to improve student engagement, academic achievement, and success after high school.

“Today’s workforce demands a new approach to high school education and California’s multiple pathways approach offers a smart solution: education directly linked to the state’s and region’s economic needs,” said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education. “This approach provides students with a learning experience that recognizes the demands—and importance—of college and career while preparing students for the full range of opportunities available after high school without limiting them to a particular career path.”

The brief is careful to note the differences between California’s multiple pathways approach and the “Multiple Pathways to Graduation” approach that has gained popularity in New York City. The New York City version is a districtwide recuperative strategy designed to offer multiple, nontraditional high school options based on data about students’ needs and reasons for dropping out of school. Meanwhile, the California Multiple Pathways approach is a comprehensive high school reform strategy used across the state that is characterized by a college-prep curriculum, a technical core organized around an industry theme, additional help for students, and workplace learning opportunities.

According to the brief, the California multiple pathways movement was developed in response to the state's struggle with dropout rates, adolescent literacy, and achievement gaps. The brief notes that although the approach is still evolving, the fundamental idea has remained consistent: engaging technical classes and opportunities that allow students to experience the workplace environment combined with academically rigorous coursework that students need to graduate career and college ready.

Specifically, each program is set in the context of a major industry sector—such as arts or medical technology—and integrates academic instruction with a demanding technical curriculum and work-based learning experiences. The result is multiyear programs of study that are rigorous, relevant, and directly connected to regional and state economic needs. And by setting up students for success in the full array of options after high school, California's multiple pathways approach seeks to bridge the college-career divide that has long characterized the American education system.

By understanding how academic concepts are valuable in work-based scenarios, students feel directly involved in their education and career paths. For example, the brief profiles a construction, architecture, and engineering focus pathways program at the Stanley E. Foster Construction Tech Academy in San Diego where students were asked to bid on the construction of a theme park for a team project. Students applied key academic and communication skills to create a business plan, get a design approved, and build a physical model. A recent survey of the academy's alumni showed that every student from the academy's Class of 2008 went on to enroll in some form of postsecondary training.

Because California is a microcosm of the United States, the brief argues that the work there offers important lessons for stakeholders addressing the national high school crisis. It cites three reasons why California's multiple pathways effort has the potential to improve student outcomes in both California and the rest of the nation:

- **Applied learning:** Research has proven that many people learn better when they are taught concepts in context.
- **Academic-technical integration:** When teachers collaborate to integrate subject matter across all disciplines, it can result in positive student outcomes.
- **Engagement and real-world context:** The relevance of coursework is important to student motivation and engagement.

At the same time, the brief pinpoints several challenges to implementing pathways reform. The first is a human capital challenge around hiring and training qualified teachers, administrators, and leaders. The brief notes that it can also be difficult to foster a culture of teacher collaboration, especially between academic and career-technical teachers. Another major obstacle is securing the funding necessary to cover the various costs associated with pathways programs—an obstacle that is further complicated during times of economic downturns or recession. And although the program garners strong support from state leadership and numerous stakeholders, administrators must also draw on a variety of local, state, and federal funding streams—in addition to donations from businesses and communities—to meet funding needs. Other impediments stem from the difficulties of aligning policies designed for traditional academic and technical policy and practice.

“The nation has much to learn from the efforts underway in California around multiple pathways,” said Wise. “Secretary Duncan’s call to innovate and an unprecedented influx of federal funding offers a unique opportunity for cross-cutting programs like multiple pathways to receive the support, funding, and flexibility needed to serve students—not just in California but everywhere. As early results from multiple pathways have demonstrated, this approach can help solve problems that are national in scope, particularly high school graduates’ lack of preparation for college and employers’ dissatisfaction with recent graduates.”

The complete brief is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/IssueBriefCAMultPathways.pdf>.

### **Raytheon Company Develops Simulator to Help Policymakers Identify Policies that Could Boost STEM Graduates**

In an effort to increase the number of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) graduates in the United States, Raytheon Company developed a simulation and modeling tool that will allow policymakers, educators, and researchers explore policy scenarios that could strengthen STEM education and workforce outcomes. At an event on July 8, Raytheon handed the model over to the Business-Higher Education Forum.

“Our nation is facing an important challenge: to ensure a robust pipeline of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics talent,” said **William H. Swanson, Raytheon’s chairman and CEO**. “For a technology company like ours, the development of the U.S. STEM Education Model has been a tremendous opportunity to apply the engineering mind set to matters close to the heart—to help secure the future of innovation in our country and of the next generation of Americans.”

The U.S. STEM Education Model allows users to simulate different scenarios in an effort to determine whether they can potentially increase the number of students choosing to major and graduate in STEM disciplines. Using complex algorithms, the model simulates and assesses the impact of STEM-policy and programmatic interventions over a period of time to determine which produce favorable outcomes. Some factors and variables that can be tested include teacher-student ratios and class sizes, dropout and graduation rates, teacher attrition rates, and teacher and STEM industry salaries. After factors are chosen, the model uses census data and standardized test scores to track the flow of students through the K–16 education system and into careers in STEM teaching or STEM industries.

Because the model is available in an open-source environment, researchers and developers can download the model freely for their own research and modeling work. To download the model or learn more about the project, visit <http://www.stemnetwork.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.