



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



MY BROTHER'S KEEPER: Obama Announces New Initiative Focused on Boys and Young Men of Color

President Obama launched a new initiative called “My Brother’s Keeper” at the White House on February 27 that will help boys and young men of color stay in school and find good jobs by focusing on key moments in their lives.



“The plain fact is there are some Americans who, in the aggregate, are consistently doing worse in our society—groups that have had the odds stacked against them in unique ways that require unique solutions; groups who’ve seen fewer opportunities that have spanned generations,” Obama said. “And by almost every measure, the group that is facing some of the most severe challenges in the twenty-first century in this country are boys and young men of color.”

The initiative has two main components. The first is a new My Brother’s Keeper Task Force that Obama created by Executive Memorandum. The task force, an interagency effort chaired by **Assistant to the President and Cabinet Secretary Broderick Johnson**, will focus on what is working in the public and private sectors to help these young people. It will also determine what federal policies and programs can better support those efforts and how to better involve state and local officials, the private sector, and the philanthropic community in these efforts.

The second component is a new commitment from foundations to award at least \$200 million over the next five years to fund solutions in key areas in a young person’s life, including early child development and school readiness, parenting and parent engagement, third-grade literacy, educational opportunity and school discipline reform, interactions with the criminal justice system, ladders to jobs and economic opportunity, and healthy families and communities.

The initiative will also leverage participation from the business community and elected officials, including **former professional basketball player Earvin “Magic” Johnson** and **former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell**, both of whom joined Obama for the announcement.

“Across this country, in government, in business, in our military, in communities in every state, we see extraordinary examples of African American and Latino men who are standing tall and

leading, and building businesses, and making our country stronger,” Obama said. “But fifty years after Dr. King talked about his dream for America’s children, the stubborn fact is that the life chances of the average black or brown child in this country lags behind by almost every measure, and is worse for boys and young men.”

Obama acknowledged that the initiative, which deals with “complicated issues that run deep in our history,” will take time, but he said its payoff could be enormous.

“We need to give every child, no matter what they look like, where they live, the chance to reach their full potential. Because if we do—if we help these wonderful young men become better husbands and fathers, and well-educated, hardworking, good citizens—then not only will they contribute to the growth and prosperity of this country, but they will pass those lessons on to their children, on to their grandchildren, will start a different cycle. And this country will be richer and stronger for it for generations to come.”

More information on the My Brother’s Keeper initiative is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper>.

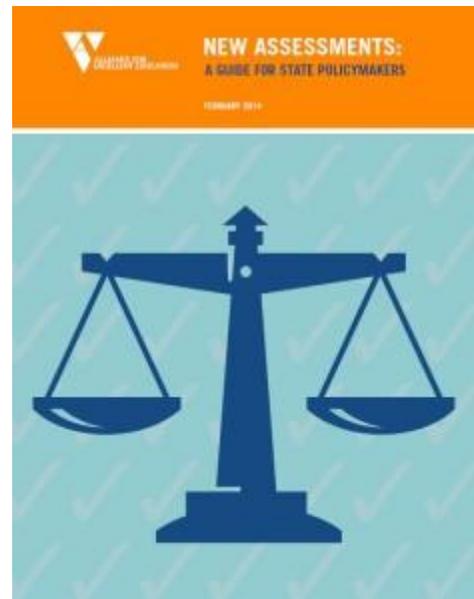


NEW ASSESSMENTS: Alliance Releases Guide Outlining What Every State Policymaker Should Know About New Assessments Aligned with College- and Career-Ready Standards

Since 2010, all states have revised their education standards or adopted new ones and most (forty-six and the District of Columbia) have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). One of the most important decisions that state policymakers will face in the coming months is how to assess students’ progress toward these new standards. *New Assessments: A Guide for State Policymakers*, released today by the Alliance for Excellent Education, offers key questions that policymakers should consider as they make decisions regarding new assessments.

“College- and career-ready standards without high-quality assessments aligned to them to advance learning is like peanut butter without jelly,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Current tests are insufficient to measure these higher learning goals and fail to deliver the information that students, teachers, and parents need to ensure that students are on a trajectory to be ready for college and a career by the time they graduate from high school.”

New Assessments offers four key questions that state policymakers should ask about proposed new assessments:



What do the assessments measure? To provide information on student performance against the standards, the assessments should measure the full range of the standards, not just those that are easiest to measure. The state consortia that are building new assessments—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—are building their assessments directly tied to the standards, and they are planning to incorporate innovative elements that tap a broad range of abilities, such as performance tasks that measure student learning that cannot be assessed by multiple-choice questions.

How do the assessments help teachers? Assessments can help instruction by providing teachers with rich information on student strengths and areas needing additional help. Both consortia plan to develop tools teachers can use throughout the years, which will help them understand where students are during the course of the year and allow them to adjust instruction accordingly. The consortia are also building digital libraries of resources to help teachers.

How do the assessments help students and parents? Assessments can help student learning by making the expectations clear. PARCC and Smarter Balanced have already published several sample items and tasks, and they plan to release many items every year. In addition, the multi-state consortia can help parents by providing, for the first time, information on student performance that is comparable across states. For example, parents in rural Maryland will be able to see how their children’s performance compares with that of students in upstate New York.

How much do the assessments cost? The PARCC assessments are expected to cost \$29.50 per pupil, about the median of what its member states currently pay for tests, while Smarter Balanced assessments are expected to cost \$22.50 per pupil (\$27.50 if states buy the interim and formative assessments as well), less than what most of its states currently spend. The higher cost reflects the fact that these assessments will not be exclusively multiple-choice and will require human scoring, which is more expensive.

While acknowledging that cost is an important consideration, *New Assessments* encourages states to look at the other side of the ledger and consider the benefits of the new assessments. Current state tests have not provided the kind of information students, parents, and teachers need. And the experience of high-performing nations shows that high-quality assessments can improve teaching and learning.

Additionally, citing research by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, the guide notes that states could afford higher-quality assessments by cutting back on the interim and benchmark assessments they currently administer, which are not tied to the CCSS and provide only limited information on student progress toward the standards. It also notes that the consortia have taken advantage of economies of scale and are able to produce higher-quality assessments at lower cost than states would be able to build on their own.

New Assessments: A Guide for State Policymakers is available at <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/new-assessments-a-guide-for-state-policymakers/>.

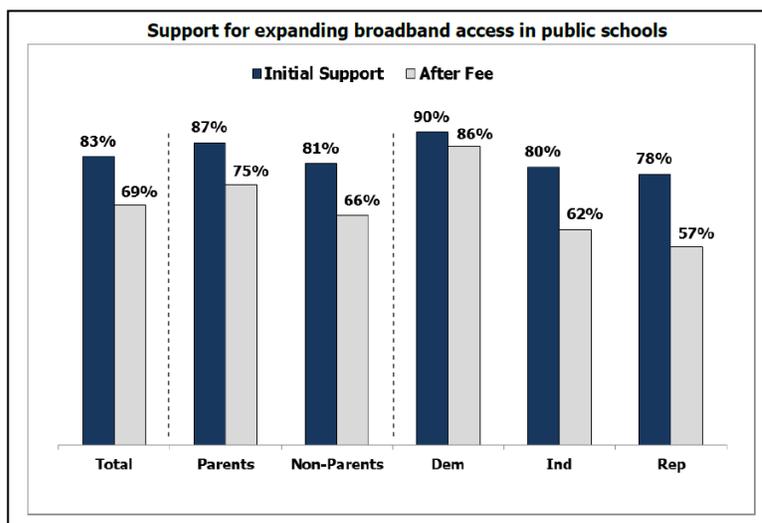


LEADING INDICATORS: More than 80 Percent of Voters Support—and Are Willing to Pay for—High-Speed Internet Access in All American Schools Within Next Five Years, Finds New LEAD Commission Survey

An “overwhelming” 83 percent of voters support a proposal to put high-speed internet access in all American public schools within the next five years, according to a recent survey from the bipartisan Leading Education by Advancing Digital (LEAD) Commission. Support for the proposal remains very high at 69 percent when voters were told that it would be paid for by a fee of about \$4 a year for three years on every cell phone user.

“We are pleased to see the public shares our concern and support for increasing access to technology in classrooms,” said **Jim Steyer, LEAD Commissioner and founder and chief executive officer of Common Sense Media**. “Technology access is not just an education issue; it is a global economic issue. We agree that more must be done to allow American teachers and students to remain globally competitive.”

Support remained high, even when broken out by political parties and parents versus non-parents. As shown in the graph to the right, majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, as well as parents and non-parents, express support for the proposal and the fee.



When asked why expanding high-speed internet access in public schools was important, 90 percent of voters said it would permit teachers to incorporate technology

into their curriculum and teach students the skills they need for twenty-first-century jobs.

Additionally, 88 percent said that high-speed internet improves the quality of education every child gets by providing access to new learning resources, online educational tools, instruction on foreign languages, college-prep tools, and distance-learning programs; 86 percent said that it would help level the playing field for students in inner-city and rural schools.

The LEAD Commission was established to determine how technology can help transform education in America. In addition to Steyer, it is cochaired by **Lee Bollinger, president of Columbia University**; **Jim Coulter, cofounder of TPG Capital**; and **former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings**. Findings from the survey are based on 800 interviews with a proportionally representative sample of registered voters nationwide.

More information on the survey is available at <http://www.leadcommission.org/news/bipartisan-lead-commission-releases-poll-finding-voters-support-improved-technology-broadband>.



PRIMARY SOURCES: Three-Quarters of Teachers Say Implementation of Common Core State Standards Will Be “Challenging” but Are Enthusiastic About Changes Associated with Them

Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of educators who teach math, English language arts, science and/or social studies in states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) believe the implementation of the CCSS will be challenging, but they are enthusiastic about the changes coming to their classrooms under the new standards. This is one of several findings related to the CCSS contained in *Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on Teaching in an Era of Change*, results from a new survey from Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“*Primary Sources* is a reflection of the most pressing issues we are facing as teachers today,” said **Naima Lilly, a math educator in New York City**. “We need to include teachers in the ongoing conversations surrounding education, particularly on the tough topics, to determine what is actually happening, how it is working, and how we can focus on solutions. The teacher’s voice is imperative and I hope this report provides insight to leaders at all levels.”

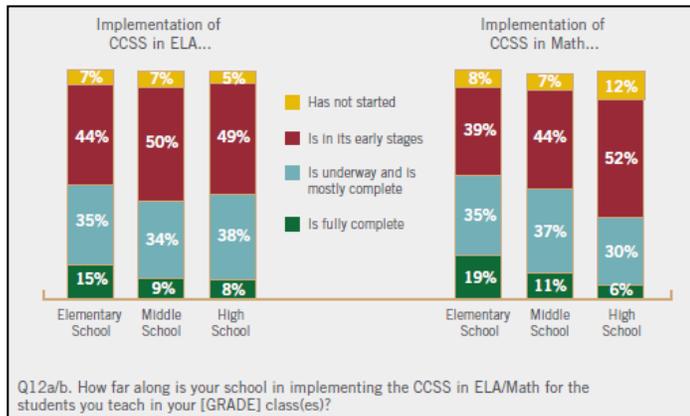
Unlike the public—62 percent of whom say they have never heard of the CCSS, according to a August 2013 PDK/Gallup poll—teachers are significantly more aware of the new standards, with 97 percent of teachers saying they have heard of the CCSS, a percentage that rises to 100 percent in states that have adopted the standards.

Results from the survey reveal that a majority of teachers (57 percent) believe that the CCSS will be “positive for most students,” compared to only 8 percent who say that CCSS will be negative for most students; 35 percent say that the standards will not make much of a difference for most students. When broken out by grade level, elementary school teachers (68 percent) were much more positive about the standards’ impact on students than middle (52 percent) or high school teachers (41 percent). Teachers in classrooms where implementation is furthest along are most likely to think Common Core’s impact will be “positive” or “very positive.”

When asked what impact the CCSS will have on certain aspects of student learning, math, English language arts (ELA), and science and/or social studies, teachers in CCSS states believe the standards will positively impact students’ ability to think critically and use reasoning skills (74 percent), present ideas based on evidence (71 percent) and students’ ability to read and comprehend informational texts (68 percent). Only 2–3 percent think the standards will have a negative or very negative impact in these areas.

When asked how implementation is progressing, 52 percent of math or ELA teachers in Common Core states say that implementation is “fully” or “mostly complete” in at least one of these areas, compared to 42 percent who say it is in its early stages; 6 percent say implementation has not started. Science and social studies teachers (28 percent and 31 percent, respectively) were less likely to say that implementation is fully or mostly complete.

The survey results also reveal that CCSS implementation is slightly further along in elementary schools than in middle or high schools. As shown in the graph to the right, 50 percent and 54 percent of elementary school ELA and math teachers, respectively, say that CCSS implementation is mostly or fully complete, compared to 46 percent and 36 percent of high school ELA and math teachers, respectively.



According to survey results, 75 percent of ELA or math teachers in Common Core states feel at least somewhat prepared to teach the CCSS, compared to 59 percent in 2011. When asked which tools and resources they need in order to successfully implement the CCSS, 76 percent of teachers say they need additional planning time to find materials and prepare lessons, while 71 percent need quality professional development. Sixty-seven percent of teachers say they need ideas on teaching in an inquiry-based way to promote “deep thinking,” while 56 percent need access to more student-centered technology and digital content.

Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on Teaching in an Era of Change is the third in a series of teacher surveys. The first occurred in 2009 and contained views on U.S. schools from more than 40,000 teachers while the second took place in 2011 and asked 10,000 teachers about the teaching profession and the view from the classroom. The latest version is based on a survey of more than 20,000 public school teachers conducted in July 2013. In addition to the findings on the CCSS, the report includes teachers’ opinions on the rewards and challenges of teaching, teacher evaluation systems, parental involvement, and more.

Complete results from the survey, which include state-by-state results, are available at <http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/index.htm>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: In Ohio, Kasich Tasks School Districts to Think ‘Outside of the Box’ to Keep Students from Dropping Out

Ohio Governor John Kasich (R) tasked local school districts with creating plans to target students at risk of dropping out of school that will keep them on a path to earning a high school diploma in his [February 24 state of the state address](#). He said 24,000 students drop out of high school in Ohio every year, joining the ranks of more than 1 million adults in the state who do not have a high school diploma.

“Dropping out is a dead end. It can lead to a life of unrealized dreams. It can lead to poverty. We need to help get these kids back on track,” Kasich said.

Kasich stressed that districts should think creatively when developing plans to curb the state’s high school dropout rate. He suggested alternative paths to a high school diploma, including real-

life job training instead of sitting in a classroom. “We’ve got to have the courage to think outside of the box because we have to reach every student,” he said.

Kasich also wants to target adults without a diploma. He announced plans for an “innovative system” that would allow adults without a high school diploma to work with two-year colleges to receive credentials, job training, and a diploma.

As another effort to keep students engaged and in school, Kasich announced a new initiative—Community Connectors—that aims to bring schools, parents, community organizations, faith-based groups, and business leaders together with students in a mentoring program. He requested \$10 million from the Ohio state legislature from lottery receipts to fund the mentoring program. Students who take part in Community Connectors would learn workplace etiquette as well as culture and values like hard work, discipline, and personal responsibility.

Kasich went on to stress the importance of dual-enrollment opportunities for students that would allow them to receive high school and college credits simultaneously, both of which would better prepare them for success in higher education.

Finally, Kasich focused on the changing landscape of higher education in Ohio. He announced that public colleges and universities will no longer receive state funding based on enrollment. Instead, the institutions will only be paid when students complete courses and degree programs.

“This is a big deal for our students and our schools,” Kasich remarked.

Kasich ended his remarks on education by stressing the importance of an education system in Ohio that equips every citizen for success throughout their lifetime.

“We must have a system that allows you—in the twenty-first century, in the global marketplace—to consistently upgrade your skills so that you’re in control of your own destiny and one day you don’t wake up and find out you don’t have the skills to compete and win,” Kasich said. “And that is our philosophy. It’s not just K—or pre-K—through J-job. It’s going to be all the way through your lifetime.”

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events 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. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Cyndi Waite; and Kate Bradley.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).