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Public Education Policy And Progress



STUDENT DATA AND PRIVACY: Alliance State and District Learning Director Testifies, Tells Congress, “Fear of Data Must Not Prevent Us from Realizing the Promise of Technology”

On June 25, in testimony before a joint congressional hearing on student data and privacy, **Thomas C. Murray, state and district digital learning director at the Alliance for Excellent Education**, said student data can be used effectively to strengthen student achievement and personalize learning for individual students while simultaneously maintaining high levels of student privacy.



“Our students need and deserve an effective, world-class education to be competitive in the global economy,” Murray said. “In the twenty-first century, that means using data and technology effectively in the classroom. Just as doctors evaluate the medical history, current condition, and records from other physicians to diagnose, care, and treat patients, teachers and administrators need access to data in order to best personalize learning for each student.” Murray’s testimony built on his fourteen years of school district service as a principal, assistant principal, teacher, and, most recently, as the director of technology and cyber education in the rural Quakertown Community School District (QCSD).

During his testimony, Murray discussed how QCSD uses data at the classroom, school, and district level to personalize instruction, analyze trends in curriculum, allocate resources, and make decisions about curriculum renewal, standardized assessments, professional learning, budgets, and more. To protect the student data it collected, QCSD uses firewalls, security certificates, and 128-bit encryption to transfer data—the same level of security used in online banking.

To better support educators in effectively using data to improve instruction while also protecting sensitive student data, Murray recommended that Congress use funds from Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. He also urged Congress to use caution as it explored policy around student data and privacy.

“Privacy concerns are real, but education in the twenty-first century must take advantage of all that technology has to offer,” Murray said. “We must not let fear of data prevent us from

realizing the promise of technology. The nation’s students, their parents, and our economy deserve nothing less.”

The joint hearing, entitled “How Data Mining Threatens Student Privacy,” was called by the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education and the U.S. Homeland Security Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies.

In addition to Murray, the hearing featured testimony by **Joel R. Reidenberg, founding academic director of the Center on Law and Information Policy at Fordham University School of Law; Mark MacCarthy, vice president of public policy at the Software & Information Industry Association; and Joyce Popp, chief information officer of the Idaho State Department of Education.**

Murray’s testimony is available at <http://all4ed.org/press/murray-testifies-on-student-data/#Testimony>.

Archived video from the hearing, opening statements, and other witness testimony are available at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=385776>.



MODERNIZING E-RATE: FCC Chairman’s Plan to Modernize E-Rate Would Provide Wi-Fi Access to 44 Million Additional Students Over Next Five Years, New FCC Report Finds

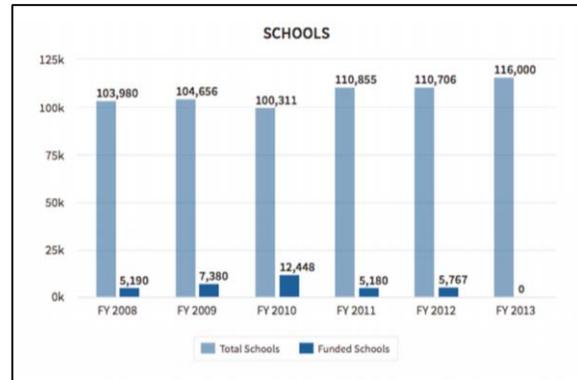
An additional 44 million students, 102,000 schools, and 16,000 libraries would have access to Wi-Fi services over the next five years under **Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Tom Wheeler’s** plan to modernize the E-rate program, according to an FCC report released on July 1. The FCC is scheduled to vote on Wheeler’s plan on Friday, July 11.

“Technology has changed. The needs of schools and libraries have changed. The E-rate program must reflect these changes.” said Chairman Wheeler. “Modernizing E-rate to expand Wi-Fi connectivity in schools and libraries will empower students and library patrons to use the latest education technology to access new learning opportunities and infinite worlds of information.”

E-rate, the federal government’s largest educational technology program, supports internet connectivity and other communications services for the nation’s schools and libraries. Currently, however, it provides little support for Wi-Fi even as students, teachers, and library patrons increasingly rely on tablets, laptops, and other devices to access the internet.

“Today, three out of five schools in America lack sufficient Wi-Fi capability needed to provide students with twenty-first-century educational tools,” [Wheeler wrote in a June 20 entry on the official FCC blog](#).

Taken from the FCC report, the graph to the right shows how E-rate supported internal internet connections such as Wi-Fi in only 4 to 11 percent of schools from 2008 to 2013. Last year, no E-rate money was available for Wi-Fi. Among the nation’s libraries, only 1 percent received any E-rate funding for Wi-Fi.



Wheeler’s plan to modernize E-rate would transition funding away from outdated technologies like pagers and dial-up connections in favor of Wi-Fi. If adopted, up to \$2 billion in funding would be provided for Wi-Fi upgrades over the next two years and result in a 75 percent increase in Wi-Fi funding for rural areas and a 60 percent increase for urban and suburban schools.

Wheeler’s plan would also take several steps to make E-rate dollars go further, including increasing transparency on how they are spent and what prices are charged for E-rate services. It would implement several changes, making the application process simpler and more efficient.

The FCC report, *Modernizing E-Rate: Providing 21st Century Wi-Fi Networks for Schools and Libraries Across America*, is available at http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2014/db0701/DOC-327993A1.pdf.



LEARNING ANALYTICS: Effective Use of Student Data Is Essential to Personalizing Learning and Increasing Student Achievement, Finds New Alliance Report

A new Alliance for Excellent Education report finds that the effective use of student data can improve teaching and learning by empowering educators to personalize instruction and increase student achievement for all students, especially those in the highest-need schools.

“This is a ‘Moneyball’ moment for education,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Moneyball changed the way statistics were used in baseball; significant improvement in technology tools and resources, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and the focus on personalized learning for all students provide a similar ‘game-changing’ moment for education. But let me be clear— success depends on confronting fast-growing issues of how data is collected while maintaining student privacy and addressing concerns from parents and the public.”

The report, *Capacity Enablers and Barriers for Learning Analytics: Implications for Policy and Practice*, focuses on “learning analytics,” which is defined as data collection and analysis for the purposes of understanding and optimizing student learning and classroom teaching. It includes student data collected through the administrative process as well as during the teaching and learning experience and permits educators to respond to data in the form of adapting instructional content, intervening with at-risk students, and providing feedback to students on what they have learned.

The effective use of data and learning analytics are both critical components of a digital learning strategy to personalize instruction for students, the report finds. The idea of learning analytics is not new—states and school districts nationwide, including several cited in the report, are moving from being data collectors to being data analyzers. For example, Kentucky linked K–12 and postsecondary data to provide high schools with a clear understanding of their students’ preparedness for and achievement in college. Utica Community Schools in Michigan created a data system that shares assignments, grades, and other information with parents and students. It includes a calling system to inform parents of emergencies and identifies student learning needs.

At the same time, however, the U.S. education system is not close to reaching the full potential of learning analytics to improve instruction for students, the report notes. In some cases, there is an overwhelming quantity of data without an organized approach to using it; in others, useful data is not available in a timely manner. Regardless of the reason, the report says that states, districts, and schools must build and improve capacity to reach the full potential of learning analytics by

- providing infrastructure and technology that fosters transparency between educators, administrators, parents, and students;
- shifting to a culture of data-informed decisionmaking by well-trained educators;
- strengthening human capital at all levels of the education system—states, districts, schools, and classrooms—by training educators and administrators to use and understand data; and
- supporting teachers through professional learning communities, including data teams, intra-district communication, and social media.

To build capacity for the effective implementation of learning analytics, policymakers and education leaders at all levels must develop a clear understanding of its potential and rationale. The report includes a set of recommendations for federal, state, and district leaders that will help ensure that policies enable the use of data while providing necessary privacy safeguards. For example,

- federal education leaders should continue to clarify and provide technical assistance on the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA); work to increase the cap on E-Rate funding; and embed incentives that support learning analytics in the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act;
- state education leaders should understand and guide districts on how federal laws, such as FERPA and COPPA, apply to the use of student-level data to improve instructional practice; consider policies that leverage the Common Core State Standards and college- and career-ready standards; develop policies so that state longitudinal data systems can interact with district data systems; consider policies to include learning analytics as a required aspect of teacher certification, preparation, and evaluation; and
- local education leaders should provide administrators, educators, and parents with a succinct explanation of how the district’s implementation protects a student’s privacy and elevate learning analytics as an essential component of professional development.

The report also stresses the importance of funding models to support learning analytics and conducting research to support the capacity building policies critical for learning analytics.

An executive summary of *Capacity Enablers and Barriers for Learning Analytics: Implications for Policy and Practice*, as well as the full report is available at <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/LearningAnalytics.pdf>.



TEACHING AND LEARNING INTERNATIONAL SURVEY: U.S. Middle School Teachers Face More Challenging Teaching Environments and Work Longer than Their International Peers, New OECD Survey Finds

On average, 64 percent of U.S. middle school teachers work in schools where more than 30 percent of students come from socio-economically disadvantaged homes. That's significantly higher than the international average of 20 percent, according to results of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

TALIS, in which American teachers participated for the first time in 2013, captures the perspectives of practitioners on key topics, including teachers' professional development needs, beliefs and attitudes about teaching that teachers bring to the classroom, and the role that school leaders play in fostering an effective teaching and learning environment. More than 100,000 teachers and school leaders at "lower secondary level" schools in thirty-four countries and economies took part in TALIS.¹

Middle school teachers in the United States report working more hours per week (45 hours) than their international colleagues (38 hours). They also report spending 27 hours per week on classroom teaching alone—much higher than the international average of 19 hours per week.

"A teacher's main work is teaching, but such a large class load normally does not leave much time for planning, grading, working with students and parents, participating in extracurricular and leadership activities and all of the other tasks that teachers do in a week," the report notes.

U.S. middle school teachers also tend to work more independently than their international peers, the survey finds. Nearly 54 percent of U.S. middle school teachers report never teaching jointly in the same classroom with a colleague, compared to 42 percent internationally. Forty-two percent of U.S. teachers say they never engage in joint projects across classes or age groups, compared to only 22 percent internationally.

"Not only can these types of activities provide in-school professional development opportunities for teachers, but TALIS data also indicate that these kinds of collaborative activities can be positively related to teachers' reported job satisfaction and to the confidence they have in their own abilities as teachers," the report notes.

U.S. teachers are more in line with the international average when it comes to job satisfaction, with approximately 90 percent of U.S. and international teachers reporting being satisfied with

¹ Lower secondary level schools serve students aged eleven to sixteen.

their jobs and roughly 80 percent saying they are satisfied with their current working environment and that, if they could decide again, they would still choose teaching. Even with these high levels of job satisfaction, however, only 34 percent of U.S. teachers and 31 percent of their international peers believe that teaching is valued by society. The report notes that countries where teachers feel valued tend to perform better on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). For example, large percentages of teachers in high-performing nations Singapore (68 percent) and Korea (67 percent) believe that teaching is valued by society.

The report also includes several recommendations to improve teaching and learning and enhance and transform the teaching profession. Recognizing that a large percentage of U.S. middle school teachers face “challenging” classroom circumstances and that U.S. teachers make less use of some collaborative practices, the report notes that school principals should consider providing opportunities and support for relationship building and collaboration at the school level. Specifically, it recommends that policymakers and school leaders “support professional development activities where teachers are given more opportunities to mentor one another and develop a strong network with one another.” Teachers are also encouraged to “seek networking and mentoring opportunities to enhance cooperation, build trust, and promote a positive school climate.”

In an attempt to address the value that society sees in teaching, the report notes that teachers who are able to participate in decisionmaking for their school are more likely to report teaching as a valued profession by society. Additionally, it finds that empowering teachers in this manner is positively related to job satisfaction and teachers’ confidence in their abilities.

“There is no single solution to these complicated issues, but providing teachers with more leadership opportunities seems to be a starting point that could benefit teachers’ careers, job satisfaction, confidence, and the school as a whole,” the report notes.

“We need to attract the best and brightest to join the profession. Teachers are the key in today’s knowledge economy, where a good education is an essential foundation for every child’s future success,” said **Andreas Schleicher, OECD director for education and skills**. “[These survey results provide] strong evidence that teachers are open to change and keen to learn and develop throughout their careers. At the same time, they need to take more initiative to work with colleagues and school leaders, and take advantage of every opportunity for professional development.”

On June 27, the Alliance for Excellent Education held a webinar on the TALIS results. Schleicher provided a deep dive on the United States and international findings from TALIS while **Stephanie Hirsh, executive director at Learning Forward**, discussed the implications for improving teaching effectiveness in the United States and the efforts under way to create powerful professional learning systems. **Alliance President Bob Wise** provided background on TALIS and served as the moderator.



Archived webinar video and Schleicher’s PowerPoint presentation are available at <http://all4ed.org/webinar-event/jun-27-2014/>.

More information on TALIS, including the complete results for the United States, is available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis-2013-results.htm>.



THE FISCAL SURVEY OF STATES: With Limited Additional Funds Available, Nation’s Governors Target K–12, Higher Education for Spending Increases

After several years of slow recovery to the nation’s economy, governors in most states are proposing small spending increases in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, bolstering core services such as K–12 education and higher education, according to *The Fiscal Survey of States: Spring 2014*, released on June 12 by the National Association of State Budget Officers.

According to the report, governors in thirty-nine states recommended spending increases for K–12 education totaling a combined increase of \$10.9 billion—the highest of any area. Medicaid (\$4.9 billion) was second, followed by higher education (\$3.5 billion), corrections (\$1.5 billion), and transportation (\$1.1 billion).

“Spending proposals have been put forth with caution and additional spending will likely be modest unless states see impressive gains in revenue,” the report reads. “As the economy continues along the trajectory of relatively slow growth, many states will continue to face difficult budgetary choices in fiscal 2015 and beyond, since revenue growth may not be sufficient to cover increased spending in many areas.”

For FY 2015, state spending is expected to increase by 2.9 percent, slower than the estimated 5 percent increase in FY 2014. Even with the increased spending levels, ten states have yet to surpass their pre-recession spending levels, the report finds. Overall, state spending in FY 2014 for all fifty states combined is still below the FY 2008 pre-recession peak after adjusting for inflation.

The complete report is available at <http://www.nasbo.org/fiscal-survey-of-states-spring-2014>.

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; Ariana Witt; 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).