



ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **A “WATERSHED” MOMENT FOR E-RATE: FCC Votes to Modernize E-Rate Program, Provide an Additional \$5 Billion for Wi-Fi Connections in Schools and Libraries Over Next Five Years**

In a landmark move, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted July 11 to modernize the federal E-rate program with the goal of providing greater Wi-Fi access to millions of students. The vote represents the first major change to the E-rate program since its creation in 1996.

“Today is a watershed moment in the history of the program, because we take the critical next step in the E-rate modernization process,” said **FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler** in his [opening statement](#). “And we are doing it the right way. We are targeting already available funds to meet the greatest current needs, we are getting as much as we can out of every E-rate dollar, and we are formally and expeditiously investigating the appropriate funding level for this program, based upon the steps we take today. That is why this item is a win for students, it’s a win for educators, and it’s a win for ratepayers.”

E-rate, the federal government’s largest educational technology program, has been a tremendous success in supporting internet connectivity and other communications services for the nation’s schools and libraries. Today, more than 95 percent of schools have some basic internet connectivity, compared to just 14 percent when E-rate was enacted in 1996. Likewise, most public libraries today are connected to the internet with 98 percent offering public internet access.

As it was previously structured, however, E-rate provided little support for Wi-Fi even as students, teachers, and library patrons increasingly rely more on tablets, laptops, and other devices to access the internet. Wheeler notes that fewer than 5 percent of schools and only 1 percent of libraries received funding for Wi-Fi in recent years and no money was available for Wi-Fi last year.

According to an [FCC factsheet](#), the E-rate Modernization Order increases focus on the “largest and most urgent need”—closing the Wi-Fi gap—while moving away from non-broadband services such as pagers and phones. This change alone is expected to expand Wi-Fi to more than 10 million students in 2015. The Order also takes 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 also makes the application process simpler and more efficient.

Regarding funding for the program, the Order maintains E-rate’s current budget of \$2.4 billion, but it also makes available an additional \$2 billion over the next two years to support Wi-Fi. For the following three years, the program will target \$1 billion annually to Wi-Fi while ensuring funding is available for broadband connectivity to schools and libraries.

Wheeler also addressed possible funding increases for the E-rate program, noting that “no responsible business would run on an IT budget last reviewed in 1998.” He said it was his preferred method to modernize the program and then address its long-term funding needs. “It would make no sense to simply add more money to a program that was still set in the twentieth century,” Wheeler said. “The changes we adopt today give us the foundation to thoroughly understand and analyze the long-term funding needs of the program, and ensure that the program remains robust for years to come.”

To help answer the funding question, the FCC issued a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking asking for feedback on how to meet long-term funding needs to meet the goals and funding targets established in the Order. It also asks for feedback on how to take further steps to facilitate the use of cost-effective consortium-based purchasing and alternative methodologies for allocating support for library Wi-Fi connectivity.

“The E-rate program has been remarkably effective, but like an old cellphone, it was becoming steadily obsolete,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, in a [statement reacting to the FCC’s vote](#). “Today, the Federal Communications Commission delivered the next generation upgrade of education. Currently, many classrooms only have sufficient internet access for a few students to be online at the same time. That’s like packing Disney World with children, then announcing only one ride is working.

“Most importantly, the FCC’s action lays the foundation for the permanent expansion of E-rate that the nation’s schools and libraries so desperately need. Reliable access to high-speed broadband is as important to learning today as traditional textbooks were twenty years ago. Today’s vote was a critical first step. I urge the FCC to quickly take the next step and permanently increase funding for E-rate so that at least 99 percent of the nation’s students will have access to high-speed broadband in their schools and libraries within the next five years.”

More information on the E-rate Modernization Order, including statements by FCC commissioners, is available at <http://www.fcc.gov/events/open-commission-meeting-july-2014>.



**ON THE PATH TO EQUITY: Teacher Attrition Costs United States Up to \$2.2 Billion Annually, Says New Alliance Report**

Roughly half a million U.S. teachers either move or leave the profession each year—attrition that costs the United States up to \$2.2 billion annually, according to a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education. This high turnover rate disproportionately affects high-poverty schools and seriously compromises the nation’s capacity to ensure that all students have access to skilled teaching, says *On the Path to Equity: Improving the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers*.

“Teacher attrition hits states and school districts in the wallet, but students and teachers pay the real price,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “The monetary cost of teacher attrition pales in comparison to the loss of human potential associated with hard-to-staff schools that disproportionately serve low-income students and students of color. In these schools, poor learning climates and low achievement often result in students—and teachers—leaving in droves.”

The report cites the well-established principle that teaching quality is the most powerful school-based factor in student learning—one that outweighs students’ social and economic background in accounting for differences in student learning. It also notes that chronic gaps remain in disadvantaged students’ access to effective teaching—a scenario that unmistakably harms students, but also has an impact on teachers.

Without access to excellent peers, mentors, and opportunities for collaboration and feedback, teachers’ performance in high-poverty schools plateaus after a few years and both morale and work environment suffer. Ultimately, the report notes, these hard-to-staff schools become known as “places to leave, not places in which to stay.” According to the report, high-poverty schools experience a teacher turnover rate of about 20 percent per calendar year—roughly 50 percent higher than the rate in more affluent schools.

To calculate the cost of teacher attrition, the Alliance worked with **Richard Ingersoll, professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania**. In addition to the national figure, Ingersoll also provides cost estimates for all fifty states and the District of Columbia that range between roughly \$2 million in Delaware, Vermont, and Wyoming and up to \$235 million in Texas.

Teachers leave their profession for a variety of reasons, including inadequate administrative support, isolated working conditions, poor student discipline, low salaries, and a lack of collective teacher influence over schoolwide decisions. Turnover is especially high among new teachers, with 40 to 50 percent leaving the profession after five years, according to research cited in the report.

To curb turnover—especially among new teachers—the report recommends a comprehensive induction program comprised of multiple types of support, including high-quality mentoring, common planning times, and ongoing support from school leaders. Teachers who receive such support have higher levels of job satisfaction, rate higher in their classroom teaching practices, and are associated with higher levels of student achievement. Unfortunately, only about half of novice teachers receive mentoring from a teacher in their teaching field or have common planning time with other teachers.

The good news is that multiple initiatives are now under way to develop professional standards for beginning teachers, strengthen preparation, and shape strategies to address the developmental needs of teachers throughout their careers. The report highlights the work of New Teacher Center (NTC), a national nonprofit organization headquartered in Santa Cruz, California that partners with states, districts, and policymakers and has established a well-designed, evidence-based induction model for beginning teachers that increases teacher retention, improves

classroom effectiveness, and advances student learning. NTC focuses on hard-to-staff schools that serve low-income students and students of color, where high rates of teacher turnover tend to be more prevalent and a disproportionately high percentage of new teachers are often employed.

NTC also partners with states and districts to report data on teaching and learning conditions using its Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) survey to help states develop policies and practices that connect related factors, such as school leadership, teaching, and learning conditions, and specific educator policies. The report cites several instances in which state policymakers have used TELL survey data to change teaching and learning conditions as part of broader reform efforts that include development and adoption of state teaching conditions standards, integration into the design and evaluation of school and district learning plans, and developing assistance for persistently low-performing schools.

*On the Path to Equity* cautions that policies to improve teaching effectiveness are complex and depend on individual teachers' abilities as well as the working conditions within schools. It adds that systemic approaches are needed to reverse the inequities in the distribution of teaching talent and to foster school environments that support the kind of ongoing, intensive professional learning that positively impacts student learning. To this end, the report offers five policy recommendations for states and districts:

- Require regular evaluations of teachers using multiple measures.
- Develop systems to encourage high-quality educator development and teaching.
- Require comprehensive induction programs for new teachers.
- Embed analysis and improvement of teaching and learning conditions.
- Support staff selection and professional growth systems that foster collegial collaboration.

“To fundamentally transform education and help students meet the higher performance required by the Common Core State Standards and other college- and career-ready standards, the culture of how teachers are supported must change,” said Wise. “Such a change requires new initiatives and structures to attract, develop, and retain the best teaching talent in high schools serving students with the greatest needs, as well as a system that ensures that new teachers receive comprehensive induction and access to school-based collaborative learning.”

In conjunction with the report's release, the Alliance held a webinar that featured Ingersoll; **Mariana Haynes, senior fellow at the Alliance; Kentucky Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday;** and **Ellen Moir, NTC's executive director.** Archived video and PowerPoint presentations from the webinar are available at <http://all4ed.org/webinar-event/jul-17-2014/>.



*On the Path to Equity* includes a state-by-state breakdown detailing the number of teachers leaving the profession, as well as a low and high estimate of teacher attrition costs for every state and the District of Columbia. The full report is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/path-to-equity>.



## **EXCELLENT EDUCATORS FOR ALL?: U.S. Department of Education Launches New Initiative to End Disparities in Students' Access to Great Teachers**

Nationally, African American and American Indian students are four times as likely as white students to attend a school where more than 20 percent of teachers are in their first year of teaching; Latino students are three times as likely, according to the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) Civil Rights Data Collection. On July 7, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** announced a new initiative to end disparities in students' access to great teachers. The Excellent Educators for All initiative would require states to submit new state educator equity plans by April 2015 describing what steps they would take to ensure that low-income students and students of color are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than other children.

"All children are entitled to a high-quality education regardless of their race, zip code, or family income. It is critically important that we provide teachers and principals the support they need to help students reach their full potential," **said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. "Despite the excellent work and deep commitment of our nation's teachers and principals, systemic inequities exist that shortchange students in high-poverty, high-minority schools across our country. We have to do better. Local leaders and educators will develop their own innovative solutions, but we must work together to enhance and invigorate our focus on how to better recruit, support and retain effective teachers and principals for all students, especially the kids who need them most."

The state educator equity plans are a pre-existing requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act that had largely gone unenforced, according to [Education Week's "Politics K-12" blog](#). "Under NCLB, which was signed into law in 2002, states were required to ensure that poor and minority students were not being taught by unqualified teachers at a higher rate than other students. But fewer than half of states have separate teacher-equity plans on file with the department," it notes.

ED is offering several tools to help states craft their plans, including a new \$4.2 million technical assistance network that would support states and districts in developing and implementing their plans, develop model plans, share promising practices, provide communities of practice for educators to discuss challenges and share lessons learned with each other, and create a network of support for educators working in high-need schools. This fall, ED will publish "Educator Equity" profiles that will help states identify gaps in access to quality teaching for low-income and minority students and highlight places where high-need schools are successfully recruiting and retaining effective educators.

More information on the initiative is available at <http://1.usa.gov/lruWvRG>.



## **PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY: New Report Examines How Eight States Use Work-Based Learning to Prepare High School Students for the Workforce**

At a time when millions of young people are either unemployed, underemployed, or under educated, the need to increase their value in the job market is ever growing. In an effort to better prepare students for the postsecondary education world of jobs, several states have created

programs in collaboration with local businesses and high schools to illustrate the importance of applied, work-based learning in high schools and two-year technical degrees.

*The Pathways to Prosperity Network: A State Progress Report, 2012–2014*, a report released on July 1 by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Jobs for the Future (JFF) highlights the work of eight states—California, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Ohio, and Tennessee—to provide middle and high school students with a systematic and sustained approach that will, according to the report, “lead to a postsecondary credential with value in the labor market.” Two more states, Arizona and Delaware, joined the pathways network in June 2014.

“The states we are working with are committed to destroying once and for all the old notion that some kids need to be prepared for college while others are being prepared for careers,” said **Robert Schwartz, professor emeritus at Harvard Graduate School of Education** who helps to lead the pathways network with colleagues at JFF. “In the twenty-first century, all young people need to be prepared both for some form of further education and a career. The pathways network is especially focused on helping states build out robust career pathways that span grades 9–14 and provide young people with a strong academic foundation and a solid core of technical skills that can enable them to get started in a high-demand, high-growth field.”

In New York, students at Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) graduate with both a diploma and an associate’s degree in a field related to computers or engineering. The school, developed through a partnership between IBM and the City University of New York, was highlighted by President Obama in last year’s State of the Union address. **New York Governor Andrew Cuomo** committed \$28 million to support statewide replication of the P-TECH model. In Tennessee, high school graduates who attend a community college or college of applied technology now receive financial assistance through Tennessee Promise, a program with the goal of graduating 500,000 more Tennesseans with a two-year or technical degree.

According to the report, state-level educators involved in establishing programs focus on the three growth areas of the economy consistently identified as the best for young people with a two-year degree seeking entry-level positions: (1) health care, (2) information technology (IT) and computer science, and (3) advanced manufacturing and pre-engineering.

Although IT skills are required for most jobs today, only twenty-two states accept computer science to meet a school math or science graduation requirement, the report notes. But through the pathways program, initiatives such as Chicago’s five early college Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) schools are not only giving students credit for computer-based learning, they are also connecting students with technology companies in their communities that could easily turn into long-term job opportunities.

“Our work in states is demonstrating that educators themselves need to know far more about the labor market,” said **Nancy Hoffman, vice president and senior advisor at JFF**. “States also are recognizing that it is crucial to have workforce intermediary organizations with expertise that can help bridge the gap between employers and educators and scale up workplace learning opportunities for young people.”

The pathways network grew out of a 2011 report from the Harvard Graduate School of Education calling for greater attention on building career pathways. Founders of the Pathways initiative argue that while there are currently programs in place that aim to increase a students' job market skills, no such programs exist across a school district. With youth unemployment at its lowest since the 1930s, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the report offers several policy actions that are crucial to developing these career pipelines:

- Encourage better coordination of resources across state agencies to provide funding for scale up of Pathways programs.
- Support acceleration of learning through dual enrollment/dual credit.
- Better integrate academic and career and technical education programs, and elevate the profile of these programs as a means to develop crucial STEM skills.
- Expand the mission and purview of workforce development organizations and other economic development nonprofits.
- Establish more robust career information and advising systems linking online resources and appropriate counseling from teachers, mentors, and others through student work-based learning plans.
- Develop policies that incentivize business involvement and work-based learning.

*The Pathways to Prosperity Network: A State Progress Report, 2012–2014* is available at <http://bit.ly/1lSeDRy>.

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A Summer Postcard from the Alliance for Excellent Education</b></p> <p>Dear <i>Straight A's</i> Reader:</p> <p>With schools around the country out for summer and the U.S. Congress nearing its August recess, the Alliance newsletter—although not the Alliance staff—will be taking a brief summer vacation.</p> <p>The next issue of <i>Straight A's</i> will be on September 8. In the meantime, please follow the Alliance on Twitter at <a href="http://www.twitter.com/all4ed">www.twitter.com/all4ed</a>, like the Alliance on Facebook at <a href="http://www.facebook.com/all4ed">www.facebook.com/all4ed</a>, and visit the Alliance's "<a href="http://www.all4ed.org/blog">High School Soup</a>" blog for the latest education news. Also, keep an eye on the Alliance's website for upcoming webinars at <a href="http://all4ed.org/webinars">http://all4ed.org/webinars</a>.</p>
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***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](http://www.all4ed.org). Follow the Alliance on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/all4ed](http://www.twitter.com/all4ed)), Facebook ([www.facebook.com/all4ed](http://www.facebook.com/all4ed)), and the Alliance's "High School Soup" blog ([www.all4ed.org/blog](http://www.all4ed.org/blog)).