



# Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## IN MEMORIAM: Alliance for Excellent Education Cofounder Gerry Leeds 1922 – 2014

The Alliance for Excellent Education is sad to report the passing of Gerard “Gerry” Leeds, who cofounded the Alliance with his wife, Lilo, in 2001. A visionary businessman, Gerry devoted his post-business life to improving educational opportunities for those most at-risk.

Born in 1922, Gerry attended a high school in Hamburg, Germany that specialized in science and engineering. He came to the United States in 1939 as a refugee from Nazi Germany and often said that he arrived with nothing except an education. For that reason, he spent most of his life working to ensure that every child had access to a quality education.

In 1971, Gerry and Lilo launched CMP Media, Inc. and turned it into a leader in providing information and internet services for high-tech industries. The company was well-known for its socially responsible policies, especially for its pioneering onsite day care center. In 1988, Gerry and Lilo turned the management of the company over to their sons and turned their attention to giving back to the country that had been very good to them, principally by working to improve the education of children at risk of failure.

In 1990, the couple launched the [Institute for Student Achievement](#) (ISA), which partners with schools and districts to transform public high schools so that students who are traditionally underserved and underperforming graduate prepared for success in college. In a [1998 New York Times](#) article, Gerry explains his rationale for launching ISA:

*When these children graduate from college, they'll be making \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year. They'll average paying \$10,000 a year in taxes. When they graduate from college, in two years they'll have paid society back in taxes. After that, society gets its money back every two years for the working life of each person. That's a pretty remarkable payoff on an investment. ... That does not say anything about the money saved in the costs from jail and the number of people on welfare. All the hospital costs and the other costs of*



Gerry and Lilo Leeds at the 2002 release of the Alliance's seminal report, *Every Child a Graduate: A Framework for an Excellent Education for all Middle and High School Students*.

*violence. It's a tremendously powerful economic thing. The most exciting part of all this is, it works.*

Studies show that ISA's largely African American and Latino student population has a four-year cohort graduation rate of nearly 80 percent—higher than the national high school graduation rates for African American students (69 percent) and Latino students (73 percent). And after four years in college, 81 percent of ISA students have either graduated or are still enrolled. To date, ISA has served over 70,000 students, providing them a pathway to high school success and college readiness.

In an effort to reach more at-risk students nationwide, Gerry and Lilo founded the Alliance for Excellent Education in 2001 and charged it with making an excellent education the right of every young person in the United States and ensuring that this right becomes national policy. Specifically, the Alliance was to focus on America's most at-risk secondary students—those in the lowest achievement quartile—who are most likely to leave school without a high school diploma or graduate unprepared for a productive future. At the time, few, if any, national policy organizations were focused on middle and high school students.

As the founder of multiple companies, Gerry's advice and insight were invaluable in getting the Alliance up and running. Working with then-president Susan Frost, Gerry was intimately involved in every aspect of the Alliance's work. His experience with ISA helped to shape the "Framework for an Excellent Education for all Middle and High School Students" that the Alliance outlined in its 2002 report, *Every Child a Graduate*. He used his keen eye for design and decades of experience in the publishing world to help design the Alliance's logo and frequently offered advice on the content and layout for this newsletter. Back then, the Alliance mailed print copies of *Straight A's* to its subscribers. Usually about a week after an issue went out, the Alliance would receive a copy from Gerry with handwritten thoughts and suggestions on how to improve it. Many of those suggestions are still in place today.

Gerry and Lilo also created the Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation, which works on early childhood education and care, gender equity, and education financing issues, and are recipients of many civic awards, including Socially Responsible Entrepreneurs of the Year, the Long Island Association Humanitarian Award, and Outstanding Philanthropists of the year for the Long Island chapter of the National Society of Fund Raising Executives. They were cited by Newsday in its report on "100 Who Shaped a Century," and were among the ten honorees selected by WCBS-TV for recognition in its annual "Fulfilling the Dream" celebration of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ultimately, however, Gerry Leeds's legacy is not the companies he created, but the lives he touched. Today, millions of individuals nationwide are better off because of him. They attended schools he helped fund and thrived under policies he championed. The luckiest of us had the honor to work with him and see his passion for education firsthand.

"There are a lot of worthwhile causes to give money to: the church, the hospitals, the museums," Gerry told the *New York Times*. "We think education is primary. Education can change the world. We support all kinds of things in a responsible way. But we're reserving the substance of what we're able to do for education."



## **“CROMNIBUS” FOR CHRISTMAS?: With December 11 Deadline Looming, Congress Considers Options to Wrap Up Funding Decisions for Education and Other Federal Programs**

Unable to pass the Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill, which funds the U.S. Department of Education, or any of the eleven other annual spending bills prior to the start of the fiscal year on October 1, the U.S. Congress passed a temporary funding mechanism, or continuing resolution (CR), in late September. That CR, which has kept the government funded and avoided a government shutdown, is due to expire on December 11, giving lawmakers little time to come to an agreement on a permanent solution.

During the week of December 1, House Republicans are expected to consider a plan to roll eleven appropriations bills, including the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill, into an omnibus bill and use another CR to fund immigration-related programs. Those favoring the CR-omnibus approach see it as a way to confront President Obama’s executive action on immigration.

Should the “Cromnibus” approach fall through, an omnibus bill that includes all twelve appropriations bills could be a possibility. Indeed, negotiations on such a bill are continuing and could produce a bill for consideration during the week of December 8. Exactly how much funding the bill could provide for education programs remains unknown because the House Appropriations Committee took no public action on its version of the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill.

With the clock ticking and the December 11 expiration date looming for the CR, a decision must be made soon.

For a more detailed look at how the annual congressional appropriations process works, download *The Congressional Appropriations Process: An Introduction*, a new report from the Congressional Research Service, the research arm of the U.S. Congress, at <http://www.senate.gov/CRSReports/crs-publish.cfm?pid=%260BL%2BP%3C%3B3%0A>.



## **EIGHTEEN ISN’T ENOUGH: Eighteen States Boast High School Graduation Rates Above 85 Percent, According to New U.S. Department of Education Data**

Eighteen states have high school graduation rates at or above 85 percent according to new data released last month from the U.S. Department of Education (ED). That number is up from sixteen states in the 2011–12 school year and nine in 2010–11.

“As a nation, it is critical that we prepare all students for success in college, careers, and in life,” writes **Joshua Pollack, special assistant to the U.S. Secretary of Education**, in a [blog post for Homeroom](#). “High school graduation is a vital point along that path, and the latest state-by-state graduation rates demonstrate our continued progress as a nation tackling this challenge.”

The data, which represents the 2012–13 school year, was calculated using the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), a common graduation rate calculation that measures the percentage of

students who successfully complete high school in four years and graduate with a regular high school diploma. Students receiving a high school equivalency credential, such as a General Educational Development (GED) credential, certificate of attendance, or any other alternative award, are not considered graduates under the ACGR. Prior to the development of the ACGR, states used several different graduation rate calculations that were unreliable because they frequently overestimated graduation rates and undercounted dropouts.

### States with the Highest and Lowest High School Graduation Rates: School Year 2012–13

State	ACGR	State	ACGR
Iowa	89.7%	District of Columbia	62.3%
Nebraska	88.5%	Oregon	68.7%
Texas	88.0%	New Mexico	70.3%
Wisconsin	88.0%	Nevada	70.7%
New Jersey	87.5%	Georgia	71.7%
North Dakota	87.5%	Alaska	71.8%
New Hampshire	87.3%	Louisiana	73.5%
Indiana	87.0%	Arizona	74.9%
Vermont	86.6%	Mississippi	75.5%
Maine	86.4%	Florida	75.6%

The data also includes graduation rates for students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.

Use ED’s state table tool to explore the data further. Visit <http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/>, then click Build a State Table, followed by Achievement Data, Graduation Rate Data, and Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates: 2012–13.

In 2015, the National Center for Education Statistics will release a report updating the national on-time high school graduation rate for the 2012–13 school year using the ACGR.



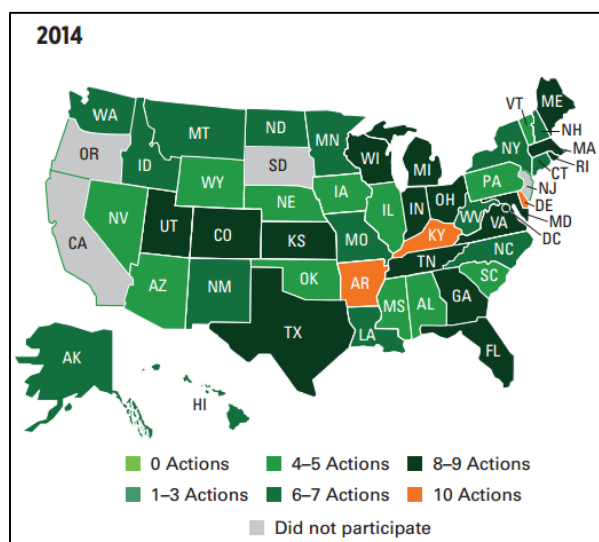
### **PAVING THE PATH TO SUCCESS: New DQC Report Stresses Importance of Using Data to Support Students, Tracks State Progress in Meeting Key Data Goals**

In 2009, the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) created “10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use” as a way to encourage states to move from *collecting* data only for compliance and accountability purposes to *using* data to support students. At the time, only eight states were budgeting state funds for data systems. Today, that number has grown to forty-one, according to *Paving the Path to Success: Data for Action 2014*, a new DQC report that tracks state progress on each of the ten action steps.

“More now than ever, states are using data to help answer critical questions, inform continuous improvement, and ultimately support students on their paths to success,” said **Aimee Rogstad Guidera, executive director of DQC**. “It’s amazing how far we have come, and the investments states have made are beginning to make a difference in the classroom.”

While only three states—Arkansas, Delaware, and Kentucky—have taken all ten state actions, eighteen states have accomplished at least eight actions, as shown in the map to the right taken from the report. On average, the number of actions achieved by states has increased from 4.7 in 2011 to 7.0 in 2014 and every state has implemented at least four of the ten actions.

Since 2009, the number of states that produce publicly accessible high school feedback reports with information on how a class of high school graduates fares in postsecondary education has grown from twelve to forty-one. The report notes that states are using this data to gauge progress and inform parents, educators, and communities where their students go after graduation and how well they are prepared for college. Only nineteen states currently link K–12 data to workforce data systems.



States are also training their educators better on how to use data appropriately. Currently, eighteen states are implementing policies and practices to ensure that educators know how to access, analyze, and use data to information teaching and learning. In 2009, no states had these activities in place.

The report, along with the accompanying video to the right, outlines how data can be used to personalize a child’s education and improve learning outcomes through the eyes of one teacher, Ms. Bullen, and one of her students, Joey. It begins in the fall, before the school year starts, when Ms. Bullen uses Joey’s past performance to set learning goals based on where he has excelled or fallen behind.



With the broader adoption of student data, privacy concerns have also increased. According to the report, thirty-six states considered 110 bills directly addressing student data. The report offers four recommendations for how state policymakers can protect the privacy, confidentiality, and security of student information. It also provides examples of high-quality public reporting of education data from Connecticut, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin. High-quality public reporting, it notes, is trustworthy and focused on meeting people’s information needs; timely and ongoing; and easy to find, access, and understand.

“Data are more than just test scores, and by effectively accessing and using different types of data—such as attendance, grades, and course-taking—teachers, parents, and school and district leaders can help ensure that every student is on a path for success every day, not just at the end of the school year,” the report notes. “Without access to the right data, pinpointing and



addressing the needs of each student or knowing which programs directly benefit students of all abilities is difficult for teachers, principals, and parents.”

*Paving the Path to Success: Data for Action 2014* is available at <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/DataForAction2014.pdf>.



## TEACHER PREP: U.S. Department of Education Announces New Regulations Aimed at Improving Teacher Training Programs

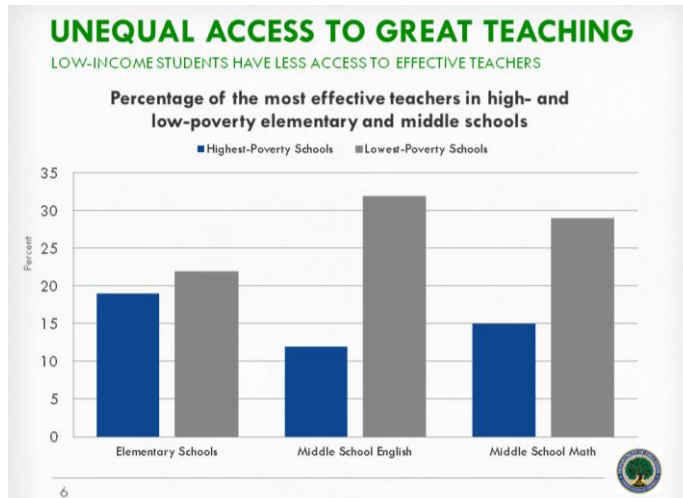
On November 25, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced new regulations for teacher training programs geared at improving teacher preparedness in the classroom. Unlike previous regulations, the new codes of practice focus more heavily on outcomes, such as job placement and the retention rate of graduates, as well as the academic performances of their students.

“It has long been clear that as a nation, we could do a far better job of preparing teachers for the classroom. It’s not just something that studies show—I hear it in my conversations with teachers, principals, and parents,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “New teachers want to do a great job for their kids, but often, they struggle at the beginning of their careers and have to figure out too much for themselves. Teachers deserve better, and our students do too. This proposal, along with our other key initiatives in supporting flexibility, equity, and leadership, will help get us closer to President Obama’s goal of putting a great teacher in every classroom, and especially in our high-need schools.”

Comparable to the [Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation’s 2013 accreditation standards](#), the new ED rules intend to positively affect high-poverty schools, which experience both high rates of ineffective teachers (see ED’s graph to the right) and high teacher turnover. In 2012–13, nearly 148,000 teachers in high-poverty schools changed schools or left the profession.

In July, the Alliance released [On the Path to Equity: Improving the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers](#),

which finds that teacher attrition costs the U.S. roughly \$2.2 billion annually. The report proposes several policies for improving teacher effectiveness, including regular evaluations of teachers using multiple measures. Under the proposal that ED released last week, states would follow more rigorous reporting systems, annually informing ED on the performances of teacher-preparation programs and alternative certificate programs, in turn allowing for more program transparency across school systems.



Not only does the proposal include greater transparency, it calls for a feedback loop among aspiring teachers, preparation programs, principals, schools, and states. ED believes the information will help prospective educators choose effective programs to train in high-demand teaching fields, assist schools in identifying the most effective programs to recruit from, recognize excellence to build on best practices, and help programs target their improvement efforts.

ED's proposed regulations include (1) performance reporting at the program level rather than the institutional level; (2) a change to the eligibility for Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education grants for students considering becoming a teacher for a high-need field or low-income school; and (3) assessing teaching programs based on four performance-level indicators—exceptional, effective, at-risk, or low-performing.

States could use a variety of indicators to assess teacher preparation programs, but would be required to include new teacher placement and retention rates, surveys of teachers and employers, and student learning outcomes. States, however, would be permitted to assess traditional and alternative route programs differently in regards to placement and retention rates.

In statements, both major teacher unions—the [National Education Association](#) and the [American Federation of Teachers \(AFT\)](#)—disagree with the decision to include student test scores to evaluate teacher preparation programs.

“Teacher preparation programs that send graduates to teach in high-need schools, where research shows the test scores are likely to be lower and the teacher turnover higher, will receive lower ratings and could lose funding,” said **AFT President Randi Weingarten**.

ED's proposed guidelines are slated to be finalized by mid-2015 following a 60-day period during which they will be open for public comment.

More information on the proposed guidelines are available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-proposes-plan-strengthen-teacher-preparation>.

***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](https://twitter.com/all4ed)), Facebook ([www.facebook.com/all4ed](https://www.facebook.com/all4ed)), and the Alliance's "High School Soup" blog ([www.all4ed.org/blog](http://www.all4ed.org/blog)).