



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



COMMON CORE AND EQUITY: New Alliance Video Series Examines Common Core Implementation Through Eyes of Educators from Five States

This week, the Alliance for Excellent Education released videos highlighting how five states—California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maryland, and Ohio—are implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and serving significant percentages of low-income students or students of color. Based on interviews that the Alliance conducted with teachers as well as school, district, and state education leaders, the videos serve as a valuable resource for other schools, districts, and states implementing the CCSS. (Click on the above image for a short video from the series).



“Opponents of the Common Core are quick to criticize the standards, but slow to listen to the individuals who are actively implementing them,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Rather than describing a broken and rigid system, the educators in these videos express overwhelming support, and even gratitude, for the Common Core.”

The videos feature state education leaders from California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maryland, and Ohio, as well as district- and school-level leaders from:

- Sanger High School, Sanger Unified School District (Sanger, California)
- Skyline High School, St. Vrain Valley School District (Longmont, Colorado)
- Seneca High School, Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, Kentucky)
- Benjamin Franklin High School, Baltimore City Public Schools (Baltimore, Maryland)
- John Hanson Middle School, Charles County Public Schools (Waldorf, Maryland)
- New Tech West High School, Cleveland Metropolitan School District (Cleveland, Ohio)

“The Alliance selected these states, districts, and schools because they are improving their high school graduation rates and making progress in closing achievement gaps—particularly among students of color and low-income students,” Wise said. “By effectively implementing the Common Core, these educators are seeing success with students who are often considered the most challenging to educate. Their positive experiences are proof that all students can learn,

achieve higher standards, and be successful given the right support, including effective and supportive educators and administrators.”

At 2:00 p.m. (ET) on January 21, the Alliance held a [webinar with educators featured in the videos](#). Gov. Wise will moderate the discussion. Archived video for the webinar will be available “on demand” at <http://all4ed.org/webinar-event/jan-21-2015/>. Please allow one day for the Alliance to post the archived video.

For more information on the video project, and to access the videos of educator insights, visit <http://all4ed.org/CommonCoreEquity/>.



ESEA UNDERWAY: Education Secretary Duncan, Senate HELP Committee Chairman Alexander Outline Priorities for Fixing NCLB in Key Speeches

The last update to the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was in 2002 when President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Since that time, NCLB has received credit for shining a spotlight on educational disparities between white students and low-income students of color, and other traditionally disadvantaged student subgroups. However, NCLB is also believed to be flawed and in desperate need of a rewrite—a view held by Republicans and Democrats alike.

In a January 12 speech that coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the introduction of the initial ESEA, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** marked the progress the nation has seen over the last fifteen years, including the highest-ever high school graduation rate, millions more in college, and the closing of achievement gaps.

“Opportunity gaps and brutal truths are swept under the rug less often, meaningful action is more frequent, and over the past fifteen years, the difference for our nation’s children has been profound,” Duncan said. “Today, a young Hispanic person is now half as likely to drop out of high school, and twice as likely to be enrolled in college. The number of black and Hispanic students taking AP exams has increased nearly five-fold. Does that mean that black and Hispanic students today are five times smarter than they were before? Of course not—they simply have five times the opportunity to demonstrate their intelligence, their desire for rigorous course work, their work ethic, and their commitment to building positive futures for themselves.”

At the same time, Duncan admitted that much more work needs to be done. “We cannot allow ourselves to believe that we are yet doing justice by all of our young people,” he said. “And frankly, everyone in this room here knows we are not even close, and the desire to right that wrong is what fuels the passion in so many of us.”

Duncan drew a stark contrast between what he saw as the two options for a new ESEA—one that “continues to move us toward that life-transforming promise of equity” or one that “walks away from it.” He outlined several “core beliefs” that he said should form the foundation of a new ESEA, including more resources for schools; high-quality preschool for all children; and better preparation, better support, and more resources for teachers.

Regarding standards, Duncan did not mention the Common Core State Standards, but he said that states should “always choose [their] standards, as they always have, and that those standards should align clearly and honestly with what young people will need to know for success in school, in college, and in life.”

Duncan stressed the importance of disaggregated data, saying that “every family ... deserves to know that schools are making a priority of the progress of all children, including those from low-income areas, racial and ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, those learning English, and others who all too often, historically, have been marginalized, and underserved, and undereducated.” He added that schools should take action to improve if students in any of those groups fall behind.

Duncan spent a significant amount of time on assessments and offered support for NCLB’s current testing mandate of annual tests in reading and math in grades three through eight and once in high school. He also said more must be done to ensure that testing and test preparation do not take too much time away from instruction.

“In many places, there are simply too many tests that take up too much time, and I know many educators and families and students are frustrated about that,” Duncan said. “We need to take action to support a better balance. And that’s why we will work with Congress to urge states and districts to review and streamline the tests they are giving and eliminate redundant and unnecessary tests, and provide support for them to do exactly that.”

Duncan believes that Republicans and Democrats can work together to write a new education law to replace NCLB but said he was “deeply concerned” about where some Republicans may be headed.

In a speech on the floor of the U.S. Senate the day after Duncan’s speech, **Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** outlined his priorities for fixing NCLB, which he said would be his “first priority as chairman.” He indicated that he would send a “lean bill” to fix the law to the Senate floor on February 23 and intends to finish work on it in the “first few months of this year.” He said the U.S. House of Representatives has a similar schedule.

Alexander called NCLB “unworkable” and said his plan is to set “realistic goals, keep the best portions of the original law, and restore to states and local communities the responsibility to decide whether local schools and teachers are succeeding or failing.” He said the bill would “build on thirty years of work by governors and chief state school officers to develop higher standards, better tests, stronger accountability systems, and fair and effective teacher and principal evaluation programs that will allow parents and communities to know how children in our country’s public schools are performing.”

Prior to his speech, Alexander circulated a [staff discussion draft of his bill](#) that outlines nine problems within NCLB. He said quick agreement was possible on four or five, but that “real differences of opinion” exist on the others. Two key differences are likely to be on assessments

and accountability. On assessments, Alexander’s draft includes two options—one that keeps NCLB’s testing requirements and another option that allows states to decide what to do on testing. On accountability, Alexander called for an end to the federally defined adequate yearly progress mandate, instead requiring states to establish their own accountability systems to measure school performance.

Margaret Spellings, who served as U.S. Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush, told [Politico](#) that Alexander’s draft offers “too much flexibility for states.” She noted that states didn’t have very strong accountability systems prior to NCLB and warned that they “could head down that path again.”

In a [statement](#), **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** applauded Alexander for moving the process forward, but he urged policymakers to consider major improvements. “Education is a civil right and ESEA is fundamentally a civil rights law,” Wise said. “I am concerned that Chairman Alexander’s discussion draft erodes the limited but important role played by the federal government in supporting the education of traditionally underserved students.”

Wise noted that Alexander’s plan reduces federal support for low-performing schools, eliminates accountability requirements for traditionally underserved students, and unfunds or eliminates several important federal programs, including School Improvement Grants, the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program, and the High School Graduation Initiative.

“Traditionally, education has been a bipartisan issue,” Wise said. “Efforts to renew ESEA have failed over the past several years largely because of the Congress’s inability to reach bipartisan agreement on key areas of education policy. Over the weeks and months ahead, the Alliance for Excellent Education looks forward to working with members of Congress within both parties to achieve a bipartisan ESEA reauthorization that maintains the federal commitment to education and upholds the principles of accuracy, equity, and excellence.”



DATES ANNOUNCED FOR TWELVE “FUTURE READY” REGIONAL SUMMITS: Summits to Help Local School Districts Improve Teaching and Student Learning Outcomes Through Effective Use of Digital Learning

Registration opened on January 15 for twelve regional summits to help school district leaders improve teaching and student learning outcomes through the effective use of technology. The summits are free of charge and are led by the Alliance for Excellent Education and U.S. Department of Education with support from the Leading Education by Advancing Digital (LEAD) Commission and a coalition of more than thirty-five content partners. Nearly 500 school district leaders nationwide are expected to participate directly in the summits and more than 1,300 additional district leaders will benefit.

“School districts across the country are helping teachers harness the power of technology to create personal learning environments for all students,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “We want to make sure every child—whether he or she is in the inner-city, in a rural

community, or on a Native American reservation—has access to knowledge and the chance to learn twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.”

The regional summits will be held in collaboration with local school districts and are open to district leadership teams on a first-come basis from districts where the superintendent has signed the [Future Ready District Pledge](#)—a promise to develop the human and technological capacity needed to personalize learning using digital tools. Already, [more than 1,300 district superintendents nationwide have taken the pledge](#).

“‘Future Ready’ isn’t just about technology,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “It’s about a more personalized approach to teaching and learning that ensures that all students have the skills they need to succeed in college and a career. Future Ready is about empowering teachers and leaders, helping students take charge of their own learning, and keeping parents engaged and informed.”

The regional summits build on “[ConnectED to the Future](#),” a White House convening recently hosted by President Obama that included more than 100 school district superintendents who had taken the Future Ready District Pledge.

The schedule for the regional summits is shown in the table to the right.

Led by trained facilitators skilled at using technology and digital learning effectively, each regional summit will serve school district teams of up to four members. The summits will focus on a comprehensive set of issues that drive student learning including: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; professional learning; technology, networks, and hardware; budget and resources; data and privacy; use of time; and community partnerships.

Date	Location
February 11–12	Raleigh, North Carolina
February 17–18	Vancouver, Washington
March 2–3	Baltimore, Maryland
March 26–27	Atlanta, Georgia
April 13–14	Phoenix, Arizona
April 21–22	West Warwick, Rhode Island
April 28–29	St. Louis, Missouri
May 4–5	Redwood City, California
June 11–12	Denver, Colorado
June 15–16	Wadsworth, Illinois
June 22–23	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
TBD	Dallas, Texas

The summits will provide district leaders with the resources and expert support to build digital learning plans that align with instructional best practices, are implemented by highly trained teachers, and lead to personalized learning experiences for all students, particularly those from traditionally underserved communities.

To provide ongoing support for the districts attending the regional summits and reach the thousands of districts that cannot attend in person, the Alliance is building a [Future Ready Schools Leadership Network](#) that will provide continuing support and tools to all districts that take the Future Ready District Pledge. As part of the network, which is sponsored by AT&T and McGraw-Hill Education, more than thirty-five national organizations representing administrators, parents, teachers, and parents will combine their resources with numerous state

and local organizations in an unprecedented effort to ensure that every school district is truly future ready.

For more information about the Future Ready regional summits, visit www.FutureReadySchools.org.



STATE OF THE STATES: Governors Point to Reauthorization of ESEA, Higher Curriculum Standards to Improve Quality of Education in Coming Years

As new state legislative sessions get underway and several states across the country swear in newly elected governors, education issues are at the forefront. During their [“state of the states” speeches](#) on behalf of the National Governors Association (NGA) on January 6, **NGA Chair Gov. John Hickenlooper (D) of Colorado** and **Vice Chair Gov. Gary Herbert (R) of Utah** pointed to the continuing need for Congress to work in tandem with states in a bipartisan effort to improve the quality of education and the accessibility of a quality education for all students. Similarly, several governors used their annual state of the state addresses to outline initiatives from pre-K through higher education to improve student outcomes in their states.

In his speech, Hickenlooper outlined several education reforms that governors have undertaken in recent years, including new programs for early education, increased funding for education, and higher standards. He noted that high standards alone “will not change much” unless they are accompanied by improvements to teaching and leadership.

Herbert said in his speech that governors were “calling on Congress” to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in a way that protects state flexibility in terms of students’ education and empowering teachers.

“[ESEA] should be done in a way that protects states’ rights to set standards and also recognizes the need for maximum flexibility as states meet goals and advance education for all of our students,” Herbert said. “The new act should reinforce the principle that accountability and responsibility for K–12 education rests with the states. It should also support governors’ strategies to improve low-performing schools. And it must also include flexibility for governors to empower teachers and school leaders to prepare all students for success.”

As Hickenlooper and Herbert outlined governors’ education priorities writ large, governors nationwide began their annual state of the state addresses to outline their own education priorities.

During his [January 13 state of the state address](#) **South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard (R)** discussed his state’s continued effort to improve student access to Career and Technical Education (CTE). He also spoke highly of a new low-cost dual-credit program that allows high school juniors and seniors to earn college credits for only \$40 a credit hour and that count toward their high school diploma.

“Dual credit is a win-win-win-win,” Daugaard said. “Students who start college or tech school with some credits already earned are more likely to complete on time and at less cost. Universities and technical institutes get the opportunity to make themselves known to prospective students, and to help prepare those students for success when they graduate. High schools gain flexibility to offer more opportunities to students, at no cost to the district. And the state gets more young people who are ready to succeed and to live and work here in South Dakota.”

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval (R) used his [January 16 state of the state address](#) to pledge \$50 million for a new “Nevada Ready 21 Plan” that will train teachers and provide digital devices to middle school students. He lamented Nevada’s “worst-in-the-nation” high school graduation rate and proposed a new grant program to ensure that high school students graduate ready for college and a career.

In his [January 5 inaugural address](#), **California Gov. Edmund Gerald “Jerry” Brown (D)** offered several educational challenges facing the state, including recruiting and training tens of thousands of teachers, helping students master the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and “fostering the creativity needed to inspire students.” He said teachers need to be held accountable, but also need “encouragement, not endless regulations, and micro-management from afar.”

The CCSS remain a hot topic for other governors as well. While some, like **Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R)**, remain opposed to the standards, others, such as **Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear (D)**, stand firmly in support of the CCSS. In his [January 7 state of the state address](#), Beshear emphasized how rigorous standards, aligned assessments, and better preparing students for life after high school have made Kentucky a success story for education reform.

“For decades, our education performance was cause for embarrassment,” Beshear said. “And universities and employers alike were sounding the alarm: Kentucky students, they warned, were simply not prepared. Today, student performance has improved tremendously, college and career readiness has skyrocketed and our graduation rates are climbing. Back in 2011, education experts measured our college and career readiness rate at 38 percent. In 2012, it jumped to 47 percent; in 2013, 54 percent; and in 2014, to 62 percent. Meanwhile, our high school graduation rate in 2013 improved to 86.1 percent. That’s twelfth, nationwide. And it’s better than all but two of our neighbors.”

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).