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Public Education Policy And Progress



## **CONGRESS PASSES BUDGET DEAL: Plan Maintains Tight Spending Restrictions Likely to Provoke Confrontation with President Obama Over Domestic Spending Priorities, Including Education**

Earlier this month, the U.S. Congress approved a budget plan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 that maintains tight spending limits on defense spending and non-defense programs, including education, and will almost certainly lead to a confrontation later in the year with President Obama on spending priorities.

“This balanced budget will provide Congress and the nation with a fiscal blueprint that challenges lawmakers to examine every dollar we spend. Americans who work hard to provide for their families and pay their taxes understand that it’s time for the federal government to live within its means, just like they do,” [said Senate Budget Committee Chairman Mike Enzi \(R-WY\).](#)

Passing the Senate by a very narrow 51–48 margin, the budget plan locks in tight spending limits that were set by the 2013 budget deal, known as sequestration. No Democrats supported it and **Senators Ted Cruz (R-TX)** and **Rand Paul (R-KY)**—both of whom are running for president—also voted against it.

Sticking to the plan would mean no increases in federal education spending in FY 2016. And looking ahead to FY 2017, the budget would cut funding for the U.S. Department of Education by \$3.5 billion if the proposed cuts were applied equally across all agencies. That \$3.5 billion cut is the equivalent of eliminating all federal support for high schools.

**Peter Orszag, former director of the Office of Management and Budget**, has said that sticking to the budget plan would “involve slashing investments in port security, medical research, education, environmental protection, and other essential activities.” He adds that the budget brazenly puts non-defense discretionary spending on a path “so unrealistic that no serious person could defend it with a straight face.”

For these reasons, Republicans and Democrats alike have called for a new budget deal that would eliminate sequestration and increase spending caps.

“I would remind my colleagues to the fact that sequestration was never intended to take place,” [said Senate Armed Services Chairman John McCain \(R-AZ\).](#) who ultimately voted for the plan. “It was designed to be so destructive and unacceptable to our national security that it would force members of Congress and the President to make hard choices and cut spending in a

meaningful way to avert sequestration. And, while sequestration may be current law, we in Congress have the ability to make new laws that can end the debilitating effects of sequestration—and I believe we must.”

Republican leaders were able to win support for the plan from defense hawks such as McCain by using an accounting maneuver called Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) to add additional money for defense spending that did not count against the spending limit.

“Instead of working with us to build on the bipartisan budget deal we struck last Congress—Republicans have introduced a budget that would lock in sequestration, hollow out defense and non-defense investments, and use gimmicks and games to paper over the problems,” said **U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)**, who negotiated the 2013 budget deal with **U.S. Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI)**.

Although nonbinding and not requiring presidential approval, the congressional budget resolution is an important step in the budget process because it sets monetary limits for the spending and tax legislation that Congress will consider for the rest of the year. It also provides guidance to the appropriations committees on how to divide resources among various federal departments and agencies, thus setting the stage for the twelve annual appropriations bills that must be passed by Congress and signed by the president, including the one that funds the U.S. Department of Education.

Earlier this year, President Obama said that he would veto spending bills at sequester levels. “I’ve been very clear,” [Obama told the \*Huffington Post\* in March](#). “We are not going to have a situation where, for example, our education spending goes back to its lowest level since the year 2000—since 15 years ago—despite a larger population and more kids to educate. ... We can’t do that to our kids, and I’m not going to sign it.”

Such a stance opens the way to at least two possibilities. One is a very long appropriations process that would drag into December or January and involve multiple temporary funding measures called continuing resolutions, which freeze funding at current levels. The other would involve a bipartisan compromise in which Republicans and Democrats agree to a larger budget deal that would raise spending levels to more acceptable levels.



## **GIVING TEACHERS A MEANINGFUL VOICE: New Center for American Progress Report Documents the Role of Teachers in Common Core Implementation**

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) cannot succeed without the involvement and support of teachers. A new report from the Center for American Progress (CAP) highlights six school districts where teachers are influencing, and leading, the implementation of the CCSS in their schools.

The CAP report profiles the work of Baltimore City Public Schools (Baltimore, Maryland); Georgetown Exempted Village Schools (Georgetown, Ohio); Marquardt School District 15 (Glendale Heights, Illinois); Poway Unified School District (San Diego, California); San Juan

Unified School District (Carmichael, California); and Washoe County School District (Reno, Nevada). Although the six districts vary in size, location, demographics, and academic achievement, all have collaborated with their local teachers' unions to share decisionmaking and "give teachers a meaningful voice" during the implementation of the CCSS, according to *Teacher Leadership: The Pathway to Common Core Success*.

"As studies show, formal partnerships between unions, administrators, and teachers help improve student learning, which is the ultimate goal of the Common Core," the report states. "Giving teachers a voice in the implementation process allows them to see value in continuing with the Common Core for student success."

Each of the districts profiled involves teachers in district- and school-level governance structures to ensure that teachers influence decisions about the CCSS and other district matters. The districts created leadership opportunities that allow teachers to work for the district or teachers' union full time to facilitate the transition to the CCSS. The districts offer leadership opportunities for teachers still actively teaching in the classroom as well so that the needs and perspectives of practicing teachers inform the implementation process.

Through these leadership opportunities, teachers in the featured districts create and direct their own professional development around the CCSS and write, develop, and select instructional materials aligned with the standards. In Baltimore City Public Schools and Poway Unified School District, for instance, teachers submit proposals to their districts' governing boards—which include teacher representatives—for professional development courses to address the needs teachers identify. In Georgetown Exempted Village Schools, teachers serve on and lead the "Instructional Task Force," a team tasked with aligning their district's instructional and assessment materials with the CCSS. San Juan Unified School District, meanwhile, selected eleven teachers for a one-year special assignment as CCSS facilitators. These facilitators oversee 120 other teachers districtwide who are trained to develop CCSS lessons and instructional materials. Additionally, San Juan Unified School District, Washoe County School District, and Marquardt School District 15 adjusted their school calendars and school-day schedules to provide teachers with additional time for planning and collaboration around the CCSS.

"As districts across the country work to implement the Common Core State Standards, they would be wise to provide teachers a significant voice and opportunity for input on implementation," the report states. "When teachers are involved in taking on new reforms, they are more likely to see value in them, which in turn can make implementation smoother."

In a similar initiative, educators nationwide are working with Achieve to evaluate and identify high-quality instructional materials aligned with the CCSS as part of the organization's Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products (EQuIP) peer review panel.

The EQuIP panel includes eighty-four educators who review lessons and units submitted by states, districts, and individual teachers against criteria-based rubrics for the English language arts (ELA)/literacy and math CCSS. Achieve established the EQuIP peer review panel in June 2013 to "build the capacity of educators to evaluate and improve the quality of instructional materials ... [and] increase the supply of high-quality lessons and units aligned to the CCSS ...."

Since then, the panel has identified more than 100 exemplary CCSS-aligned lessons, which are available to teachers for free on the [EQuIP website](#).

“Developing coherent and engaging unit plans is a core aspect of effective teaching, but I rarely receive content-specific feedback from administrators or colleagues,” said Kristi Brantley, a seventh-grade ELA teacher at Pacetti Bay Middle School in St. Augustine, Florida. “Submitting my unit to the EQuIP Call to Action gave me the opportunity to receive detailed feedback about my work and gave me a way to gauge my professional development. This is a great opportunity to collaborate with other teachers and share the best ideas in the business.”

CAP’s report, *Teacher Leadership: The Pathway to Common Core Success*, is available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2015/04/28/111762/teacher-leadership/>.

For additional perspectives on how states and school districts are involving teachers in the implementation of the CCSS, view the Alliance’s Common Core and Equity video series at <http://all4ed.org/commoncoreequity/>.



### **DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HISTORY ... OR GEOGRAPHY ... OR CIVICS: More than 75 Percent of Students Score Below Proficient on Nation’s Report Card**

Approximately 25 percent of eighth-grade students perform below a basic level in U.S. history, geography, and civics, according to the latest results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card. Eighth graders’ average scores in all three subjects were unchanged since 2010 and few students reached proficiency. Specifically, only 27 percent of eighth graders scored at or above proficient in geography while only 23 percent reached that level in civics. In U.S. history, only 18 percent were at or above proficient.

“Geography, U.S. history, and civics are core academic subjects that must be a priority. They represent knowledge and skills that are fundamental to a healthy democracy,” said **Terry Mazany, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees NAEP**. “The lack of knowledge on the part of America’s students is unacceptable, and the lack of growth must be addressed. As a country, we must do better.”

In U.S. history, eighth graders posted an average score of 267 on a 500-point scale in 2014, which represents no significant change since the last test in 2010, but it is higher than the average score of 259 on the first assessment in 1994. In geography, the average score of 261 was no different from 2010 or 1994. In civics, the average score of 154 was not significantly different in 2010, but it was higher than the 150 posted during the first assessment year in 1998.

In 2018, at the next scheduled assessment of the U.S. history, geography, and civics assessments, the tests will be administered to eighth- and twelfth-grade students. For the first time, those three assessments will be entirely computer-based.

The complete results are available at [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/hgc\\_2014/](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/hgc_2014/).



## EDUCATING THE WHOLE STUDENT: New Study Highlights Three Diverse High Schools Implementing Social Emotional Learning

Increasingly, researchers and educators recognize that schools cannot focus solely on students' academic learning to improve achievement. They also must nurture students' psychological development, often described as social emotional learning (SEL). While this new focus on SEL benefits all students, it is especially critical for low-income students and students of color, according to *Social Emotional Learning in High School: How Three Urban High Schools Engage, Educate, and Empower Youth*, a new study from the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE).

“[F]ailing to meet students' psychological, social, and emotional needs will continue to fuel gaps in opportunity and achievement for students—in particular, low-income students and students of color—who are frequently underserved by the large one-size-fits-all schools they attend,”

**MarYam G. Hamedani, associate director of Stanford University's Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity**, writes in a post for *Education Week's* [Learning Deeply](#) blog.

“While psychological supports alone don't erase the burden of poverty or eliminate the challenges faced by historically underserved students, they can help mitigate the effects and clear a path for achievement.”

The SCOPE study examines how three diverse small public high schools have implemented social emotional learning schoolwide and analyzes that implementation across three areas—school climate and culture, organizational features and structures, and school practices. The researchers selected the three schools—Fenway High School (Boston, Massachusetts), El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice (Brooklyn, New York), and International School of the Americas (San Antonio, Texas)—because each school has an explicit schoolwide focus on SEL and demonstrated stronger academic outcomes and graduation rates than similar schools in their districts. Although each school serves fewer than 500 students, each one serves predominantly students of color. At Fenway High School and El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, the majority of students also qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, while at the International School of the Americas about one-quarter of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Hamedani, the study's project director, and her colleagues conducted in-depth case studies of the three SEL high schools, surveyed their students, and compared their responses with a national survey of students in traditional public high schools. Students in the SEL high schools reported a more caring school climate, stronger relationships with teachers, greater engagement with school, stronger feelings of efficacy and resilience, and more ambitious goals for higher education, compared to students not attending SEL schools.

While traditional SEL focuses primarily on students' abilities to understand themselves and build supportive relationships with others, the schools featured in the SCOPE study take an expanded view of SEL that emphasizes social justice education as a well. The researchers determined that the social justice component enhances SEL by grounding it directly in the needs of the diverse student populations the schools serve and encourages students to examine issues of equity and advancement in their local communities.

“While social emotional learning is critical to providing students with an equitable education, we found that an expanded vision incorporating a social justice education perspective is essential,” said **Linda Darling-Hammond, coauthor of the study, Stanford University Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, and SCOPE faculty director.** “Each of the schools in this study has developed ways to implement these approaches successfully.”

According to the study, each of the high schools integrates SEL into all aspects of school life to educate the “whole student,” creating climates, norms, and expectations that place students’ psychological needs on par with their academic needs. Furthermore, the schools prioritize the social and emotional needs of school staff to equip teachers and other staff members with the skills and resources necessary to support students’ social and emotional growth.

Additionally, the “curricular design and instructional practices [at the schools] integrate social emotional learning with academics through both content—what students learn—and process—how they learn it,” the report states. The three high schools designate specific times for students to receive direct instruction on social emotional skills. They also emphasize project-based learning to allow students to practice and apply their social emotional skills through collaborative group projects in their classrooms and communities. This systemic approach to SEL benefits students more than a programmatic approach since it provides regular opportunities for students to practice and refine their social emotional skills and continuously reinforces SEL in comprehensive ways.

“A growing body of research shows that when schools attend to students’ psychological, social, and emotional development alongside academic learning, student engagement and academic achievement improve,” Hamedani writes in her [blog post](#). “While we can’t clearly prove direct cause and effect between the schools’ social emotional and social justice skill building and positive student responses, our findings suggest these approaches hold promise.”

*Social Emotional Learning in High School: How Three Urban High Schools Engage, Educate, and Empower Youth* is available at <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/1310>.



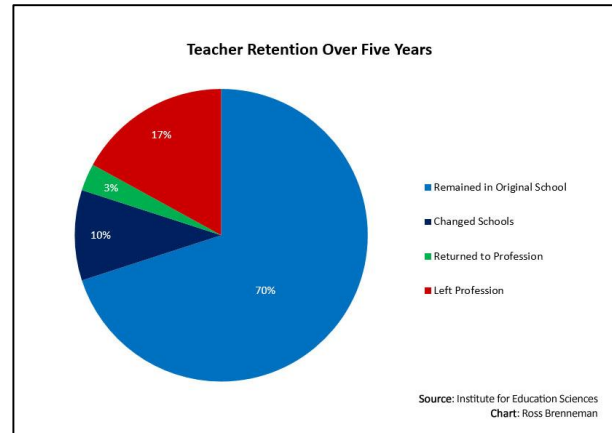
### **TEACHER ATTRITION: New Research Shows Fewer New Teachers Are Leaving the Profession than Previously Thought**

The rate at which new teachers leave the teaching profession is lower than previously believed, according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics’s [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#), a research arm of the U.S. Department of Education. *Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results From the First Through Fifth Waves of the 2007–08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study*, finds that just 17 percent of new teachers left their jobs within the first five years—a much lower attrition rate than the previously believed rate of nearly 50 percent.

The Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS) attempts to address the shortcomings of previous teacher retention research, which the report said was “sometimes inconsistent” or only covered two years of teachers’ careers. Researchers at IES followed 1,990 first-year public school teachers who entered the profession in School Year (SY) 2007–08 through SY 2011–12.



According to the report, 10 percent of all beginning teachers in SY 2007–08 did not teach the following year, while 17.3 percent did not teach in SY 2011–12. The report also finds that 74 percent of beginning teachers taught in the same school during their second year as their first year and 70 percent taught in the same school in their fifth year. Among teachers who moved schools in their second and fifth years, 21 percent and 40 percent, respectively, moved unwillingly due to their contracts not being renewed.



IES researchers also examined the effects of mentorship on the attrition rates of new teachers, finding that teachers who have access to peer mentoring leave the profession at a much lower rate than those who do not. After the first year, 92 percent of teachers with first-year mentors were still teaching, compared with 84 percent without mentors. After five years, 86 percent of teachers who had first-year mentors were still teaching, compared to 71 percent without mentors.

The report also finds that male teachers tend to drop out of the profession at a faster rate than female teachers, with 21 percent of men leaving the profession after the fifth year compared to 15 percent of women. Overall, white teachers remain in the profession at a greater rate compared to other ethnicities, but the retention rates among all groups are similar. Among white, non-Hispanic teachers, 83 percent were still teaching after five years, compared to 80 percent of all other races and ethnicities.

Retention rates were somewhat dependent on salary as 97 percent of teachers making \$40,000 or more were still teaching in the second year, compared to 87 percent of those making less than \$40,000, the report finds.

*Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results From the First Through Fifth Waves of the 2007–08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study* is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015337.pdf>.

***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; Kristen Loschert; 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)).