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# Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **APPROPRIATIONS UNDERWAY: House Spending Bill Would Cut Federal Education Funding by \$2.8 Billion, Eliminate More than Twenty-Five Programs**

Funding for the U.S. Department of Education would be cut by \$2.8 billion and more than twenty-five federal education programs would be eliminated under the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill, which passed a House Appropriations Subcommittee on July 17. The full House Appropriations Committee is expected to vote on the bill on June 24.

“This legislation continues our efforts to reduce wasteful spending, to stop harmful and unnecessary regulations that kill jobs and impede economic growth, and to make wise investments in proven programs on behalf of the American taxpayer,” [said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers \(R-KY\)](#). “This bill fulfills these goals, funding cutting-edge medical research, education for disabled children, veterans’ programs, community health centers, Meals on Wheels, and charter schools. At the same time, the bill reflects careful consideration of every program, cutting the fat and making the most of every dollar.”

[Representative Nita Lowey \(D-NY\), top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said she was “very pleased”](#) with the \$1.1 billion increase that the bill would provide to the National Institutes of Health and added that the increases for Head Start and special education “could make a real difference in the lives of children in need.” At the same time, however, she said that providing increases for those programs meant “gutting” the rest of the programs in the bill in order to remain under the [tight spending limit](#) that the U.S. Congress set for itself—a limit that Lowey called “grossly inadequate.”

The bill eliminates funding for twenty-seven education programs, including School Improvement Grants, the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program, and other programs to support innovation, gifted and talented students, school counselors, and Advanced Placement courses. Funding for Title I, which supports schools serving traditionally underserved students and is the largest federal funding stream for K–12 education, would remain at current funding levels under the House’s proposal.

## **Democrats Seeking Bipartisan Budget Negotiations to Lift Tight Spending Caps**

Members of the House and Senate appropriations committees are working within very tight spending limits that were set by the 2011 budget deal, also known as sequestration, and locked in

by the [budget plan that Congress adopted in May](#). Under the plan, overall discretionary spending for FY 2016 can rise by less than 1 percent, creating a scenario in which a funding increase for one program often translates into a funding cut for another program.

Earlier this year, President Obama said that he would veto spending bills that were set according to the terms dictated by the sequester. “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.”

When the sequester was adopted, its spending limits were seen as so draconian—for defense spending and domestic spending alike—that it was believed it would force Republicans and Democrats to negotiate a broader budget deal that would lift the spending limits. That has not happened. Instead, Republican leaders increased funding for defense by \$38 billion using an accounting maneuver called Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) to add additional money that did not count against the spending limit. No such loophole exists for domestic programs such as education.

On June 18, **U.S. Senators Harry Reid (D-NV), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Charles Schumer (D-NY), and Patty Murray (D-WA)** sent a [letter](#) to Senate Republican leaders calling for bipartisan budget negotiations. “We write to urge you to immediately schedule bipartisan budget negotiations for next week to replace the devastating spending cuts to our national defense and domestic investments known as sequestration,” the letter reads.

“Throughout this appropriations season I’ve heard about difficult choices,” Lowey said. “But this isn’t about choices—it’s about priorities and investing in the future. We could make the choice, today, to work together on a deal to remove the sequester and fund the government at levels that would not leave us behind in a global market. That is a choice we could make. But this bill, and these funding levels, this is a consequence of the Congress’s choice of inaction.”

The U.S. Senate is expected to begin its work on education spending this week when an appropriations subcommittee considers its version of the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill on June 23, with the bill moving to the full Senate Appropriations Committee on June 25. The next steps are unclear, with Senate Democrats threatening to hold up additional work on appropriations until Republicans agree to negotiate a budget deal that would lift defense and domestic spending limits.

“It’s only June, but it already looks like it might take a while before these differences are ironed out,” said **Rachel Bird Niebling, senior policy and advocacy associate at the Alliance for Excellent Education**, in the [June 19 episode of “Federal Flash,”](#) the Alliance’s five-minute video series on important developments in education policy in Washington, DC. “This week’s action is only the opening salvo in a partisan fight that could last all the way into December, if not longer.”



## ***COURSE, COUNSELOR, AND TEACHER GAPS: Students in High-Poverty Schools Receive Inadequate College Preparation, According to New Study***

High schools that serve predominantly low-income students have the least experienced and least qualified teachers, provide limited or no access to school counselors, and offer a less rigorous curriculum than schools that serve primarily affluent students, according to a study from the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Consequently, students who attend these high-poverty schools are less likely to enroll in college and more likely to require remedial course work if they do attend, according to *Course, Counselor, and Teacher Gaps: Addressing the College Readiness Challenge in High-Poverty High Schools*.

The CLASP report analyzes School Year 2011–12 data from the 100 largest school districts nationwide, examining trends in the districts’ 2,275 public high schools. Collectively, these schools serve 2.8 million students representing 20 percent of the nation’s total public high school population. The report finds that high schools with the largest concentrations of poor students lack the resources and supports necessary to prepare students to enroll and succeed in college.

“High-poverty schools struggle with lack of funding, crumbling infrastructure, community safety hazards, and teacher shortages,” according to the report. “This severely affects their ability to provide high-quality education. Without effective K–12 education, students will flounder in postsecondary settings.”

Furthermore, these schools serve predominantly, and disproportionately, students of color. Among the school districts examined in the CLASP study, African American students represent more than 36 percent of students in high-poverty high schools, even though they represent less than 16 percent of the total K–12 public school student population, according to [2012 data from the National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#). Similarly, American Indian students represent nearly 18 percent of students in CLASP’s high-poverty high schools, but just 1.1 percent of the total K–12 public school student population, while Hispanic students represent almost 28 percent of students in CLASP’s high-poverty schools, and 24.5 percent of the total K–12 public school student population, according to NCES.

By contrast, white students, who represent 51 percent of all K–12 public school students nationwide, represent a mere 3.6 percent of students in the highest poverty high schools in the nation’s largest school districts. Diminished resources in high-poverty schools exacerbate gaps in college attendance and completion between poor students of color and their affluent peers.

“While some high-poverty schools defy the odds by providing an education that prepares students for college, this is not the norm,” the report states. “The disparity in college completion between low-income and higher-income students can be attributed, in part, to poor preparation in high-poverty K–12 schools.”

At high-poverty schools—those where more than 75 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch—14.5 percent of teachers are in their first or second year of teaching, according to the report. By contrast, at low-poverty schools—ones where less than 25 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch—only 9.5 percent of teachers are first- or

second-year educators. Additionally, 11.5 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools are not certified, compared to just 3.5 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools.

“Teacher quality is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement,” according to the CLASP study. “Because the work environment in schools serving large numbers of low-income children is very challenging, it is difficult to attract and keep the most experienced, well-equipped teachers.”

Furthermore, high-poverty high schools offer fewer advanced-level math and science courses, which students need to succeed in college, the report says. While 94 percent of low-poverty schools offer Algebra II, only 84 percent of high-poverty schools offer the course. The divide is even greater for physics and calculus. Although 90 percent of low-poverty schools offer physics and 85 percent of low-poverty schools offer calculus, only 69 percent and 41 percent of high-poverty schools, respectively, offer the highest level science and math courses.

Additionally, students in high-poverty high schools have less access to school-based guidance counselors, which hinders their ability to explore and pursue postsecondary education options, according to the CLASP study. “Students in high-poverty schools have the strongest need for counselors because their families and community networks are less familiar with higher education opportunities,” the report states. Yet, more than 3 percent of students in high-poverty schools attend a high school without a guidance counselor, compared to just 1.7 percent of students in low-poverty high schools.

“In today’s education reform climate, where the push is for high achievement and greater accountability, equity is more important than ever,” the reports states. “We cannot hold all students to the same standards without also ensuring that every school provides the same quality of education. ... [I]mproving postsecondary enrollment and completion requires that we address resource disparities between affluent high schools and those in communities of concentrated poverty.”

*Course, Counselor, and Teacher Gaps: Addressing the College Readiness Challenge in High-Poverty High Schools* is available at <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/CollegeReadinessPaperFINALJune.pdf>.

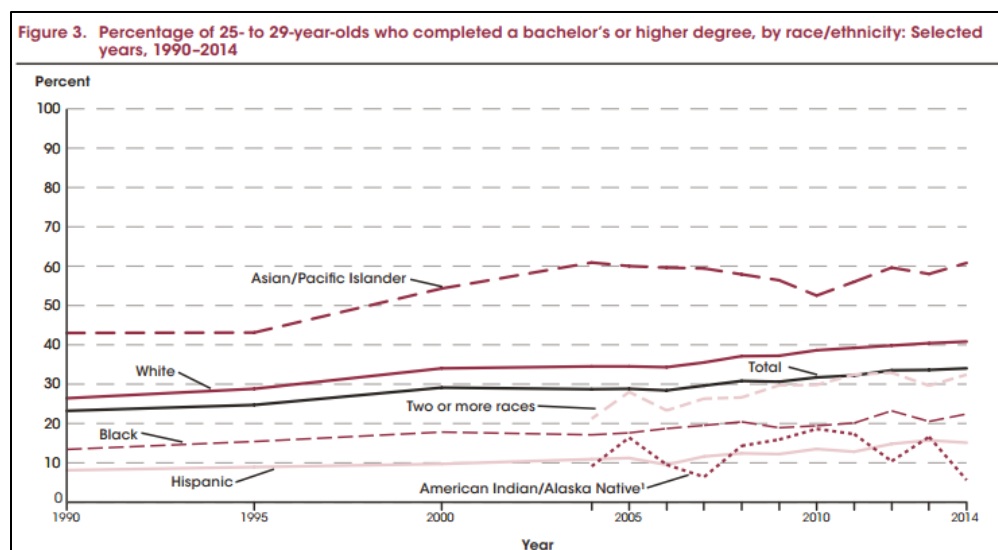


**THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION: Report Notes Increases in Postsecondary School Degrees, English Language Learners, and Students Living in Poverty**

The number of adults who earn postsecondary school degrees is increasing, according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics Institute for Education Sciences. *The Condition of Education 2015*, an annual report meant to inform members of Congress, offers up 300 pages of statistics gathered across forty-two key indicators of education trends for U.S. public and private K–12 schools, as well as higher education institutions, making it a valuable one-stop guide for those seeking information on education statistics.

According to the report, 34 percent of young adults ages 25 to 29 had a bachelor’s or higher degree in 2014, up from 23 percent in 1990. However, significant completion gaps exist between

white students and students of color. As shown in the graph below, 41 percent of white individuals earned a bachelor's degree or higher in 2014, compared to 22 percent for African Americans, and 15 percent of Latinos. The completion rate for American Indian/Alaska Native was lower in 2014 than it was in 1990.



“The United States has seen progress in many areas related to the education of its young people,” the report notes. “Despite these achievements, disparities in educational and other outcomes persist in the aggregate for male youth compared to their female peers in general, and for boys and young men of color in particular.”

Contributing to these factors is the rise in postsecondary education enrollment. In fall 2013, undergraduate enrollment at colleges and universities reached 17.5 million students, up from 12 million in 1990. Post-baccalaureate degree programs enrolled 2.9 million students that same year. This sector of higher educated young adults also faced a generally lower rate of unemployment than those who did not earn college degrees in 2014, according to the report.

New to the report this year are indicators that describe approaches to learning behaviors for first-time kindergartners, disparities in educational outcomes among male youth of color, and differences in postsecondary education degree completion by socioeconomic status. The inclusion of the socioeconomic indicator for postsecondary education attainment, for example, reveals that just 14 percent of students from low socioeconomic background received a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 29 percent for those in the middle tier and 60 percent in the high tier of economic status.

Relatedly, the report notes that the number of young people earning high school diplomas has also increased. *The Condition of Education* finds that 91 percent of young adults ages 25 to 29 earned a high school diploma or its equivalent in 2014, up from 86 percent in 1990. Latino students saw the greatest gain in attainment in this timeframe, increasing from 58 percent to 75 percent of students earning a high school diploma or its equivalent. Still, both Latino and African American students (at 92 percent) lag behind their white peers (at 96 percent) In addition,

roughly 3.1 million (81 percent) of public high school students graduated on time with a regular diploma during School Year (SY) 2011–12.

Among its demographic information, the report finds that the number of English language learners enrolled in U.S. public schools continues to steadily climb and accounted for 9.2 percent of students for SY 2012–13. Additionally, the number of students living in poverty continues to increase. According to the report, 21 percent—approximately 15.6 million—of school-aged children lived in poverty in 2013, an increase from 15 percent in 2000.

Download *The Condition of Education 2015* at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015144.pdf>.



### **MAKING TECHNOLOGY COUNT: Lack of Support, Poor Professional Development, and Pedagogical Beliefs Limit Teachers' Use of Technology**

Despite the massive investments school districts have made in digital content, computers, and other devices, education technology has not transformed most teachers' instruction, according to the latest technology report from *Education Week*. While the majority of teachers use digital tools to simplify their own responsibilities and supplement traditional instructional approaches, few use technology to enable students to direct their own learning.

“The student-centered, hands-on, personalized instruction envisioned by the ed-tech proponents remains the exception to the rule,” writes **Benjamin Herold, staff writer for *Education Week* and contributor to *Technology Counts 2015: Learning the Digital Way***.

Public schools spend more than \$3 billion each year on digital content and most provide at least one computer for every five students, according to *Technology Counts*. Although many teachers use digital devices to communicate with colleagues, access information online, and plan lessons, the addition of technology has not fundamentally altered how they teach, Herold writes.

Access to devices and high-speed networks used to present the primary obstacle to incorporating technology into instruction, Herold notes. But today's challenges generally concern teachers' expertise and comfort using technology, as well as their beliefs about its perceived value, he adds. Many teachers do not understand how educational technology works or remain unfamiliar with instructional strategies that leverage technology in meaningful ways. Other educators, meanwhile, avoid technology for philosophical reasons or pedagogical beliefs that favor more traditional instructional methods, Herold explains.

Part of the problem stems from inadequate professional development for teachers, according to *Technology Counts*. Districts that have stumbled when introducing new devices and digital learning plans often did not prepare teachers fully for the transition or provide sufficient ongoing support and opportunities for teachers to collaborate, writes **Malia Herman, contributing writer for *Technology Counts***. Teacher training cannot focus solely on how devices and software operate, she notes. Instead, districts must develop a clear vision that explains how technology will support student learning and then help teachers develop the necessary instructional strategies to achieve those goals, Herman writes. Additionally, professional



development should occur throughout the workday, rather than in stand-alone sessions, and connect directly to the specific classroom issues teachers encounter, Herold adds.

Districts implementing digital learning plans also encounter problems when they focus solely on devices instead of prioritizing the curriculum and instructional content those devices will support, Herman writes. Too often, districts simply load digital versions of textbooks onto tablets and computers and expect instruction to change, Herman notes. Successful districts evaluate and curate content and digital lessons from multiple sources and then support teachers as they introduce the new material, she adds. School districts hit roadblocks when they move too quickly as well, purchasing and distributing devices without outlining student learning goals, Herman writes. Herman advises districts to start small when putting new educational technologies in place, introducing devices and digital learning plans initially in a single subject or grade, for instance, and also to build widespread community support for the changes.

*As Technology Counts* points out, implementing meaningful digital learning requires more than just purchasing devices for a school district. It requires thoughtful planning, preparation, and analyses of student outcomes, teacher development, school culture, and leadership. The Alliance for Excellent Education developed the [Future Ready Interactive Planning Dashboard](#) to help school district leaders plan for using technology effectively to engage students, empower teachers, and improve learning outcomes.

This free online tool guides school district leaders through each step of a systemic planning process to create a comprehensive approach for implementing digital learning before they purchase a single device. The dashboard allows school leaders to both assess their overall readiness for transitioning to digital learning and evaluate specific needs in seven core areas, including curriculum, instruction, and professional learning. The dashboard also offers strategies and resources districts can use to address their individual needs.

*Technology Counts 2015: Learning the Digital Way* is available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2015/06/11/index.html?intc=EW-TC15-LNAV>.

***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)).