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Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



SUPPORTING LITERACY WITHIN ESEA: With More than Half of the Nation's Students Struggling with Reading, NCLB Rewrite Must Address Students' Literacy Needs Says New Alliance Report

Noting that 60 percent of both fourth and eighth graders currently struggle with reading, a new Alliance for Excellent Education report urges the U.S. Congress to focus on students' literacy development from early childhood through grade twelve as it works to rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

"Teaching students to read when they are young is an important booster shot, but not a lifelong inoculation, against further reading problems," said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education**. "Instead, students need continued reading and writing support throughout their educational career—especially as they encounter more challenging reading material in middle and high school. Unfortunately, few states provide this continued support, and as a result, the majority of today's students leave high school without the reading and writing skills necessary for success in an information-age economy."

According to the report, *The Next Chapter: Supporting Literacy Within ESEA*, the problem is especially acute among students of color and students from low-income families, nearly half of whom enter fifth grade without rudimentary reading skills. Based on the 2013 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, 50 percent of African Americans, 47 percent of Latinos, and 47 percent of students from low-income families read below NAEP's basic level.

"Without essential literacy skills to master academic course work, students lose the motivation and confidence vital to maintaining their investment in learning," the report notes. "Furthermore, students who do not read well are more likely to be retained in school, drop out of high school, become teen parents, or enter the juvenile justice system."

As part of a solution, the report highlights proposed federal legislation, the Literacy Education for All, Results for a Nation (LEARN) Act, which would encourage schools and educators to use research-based strategies to teach reading and writing within subject areas and across grade levels. The LEARN Act would also support schools to provide high-quality classroom literacy



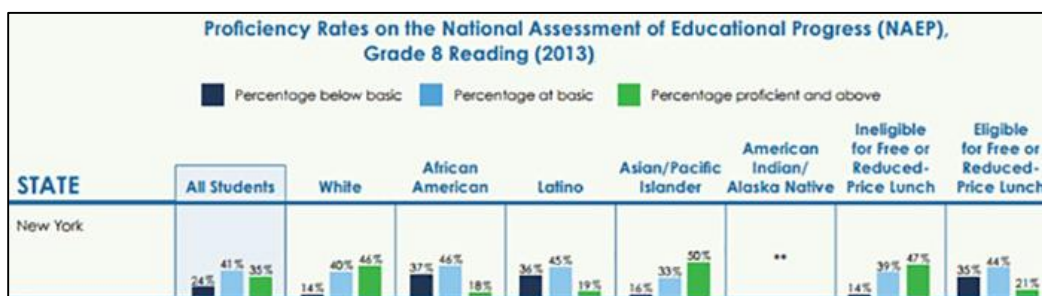
instruction as well as a continuum of interventions and support for students with or at risk of reading failure.

Elements of the LEARN Act were included in the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA), which is the U.S. Senate’s legislation to rewrite NCLB.

Following Senate passage of ECAA in July, **U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)**, who first introduced the LEARN Act in 2009, issued a [written statement](#) expressing support for the literacy provisions.

“In the Every Child Achieves Act, the bipartisan legislation I worked on with Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), to fix No Child Left Behind, I fought to include critical provisions of the LEARN Act, including dedicated funding for comprehensive literacy programs,” Murray writes. “These programs will provide support to hardworking teachers and other professionals so that they can improve literacy instruction and programming for our most vulnerable students. I was proud when ECAA passed the Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support, and I am going to continue to support programs that will improve the literacy of all students as this legislation moves forward.”

In addition to its legislative recommendations, *The Next Chapter* includes detailed graphs showing state-by-state NAEP reading achievement results for fourth and eighth grades and includes data broken down for African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino, and white students, as well as for students who are eligible/ineligible for free or reduced-price lunch. An example for eighth-grade students in New York is below.



The report also examines why students struggle to read and measures the success of other federal efforts to improve literacy, including Reading First and the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program. Noting that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides essential protections for students with a wide range of disabilities, including those that affect reading achievement, the report stresses that IDEA was never intended to address the problem of inadequate instruction and intervention for students who experience poor literacy achievement in the nation’s schools.

The Next Chapter: Supporting Literacy Within ESEA is available at <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/LiteracyWithinESEA/>.

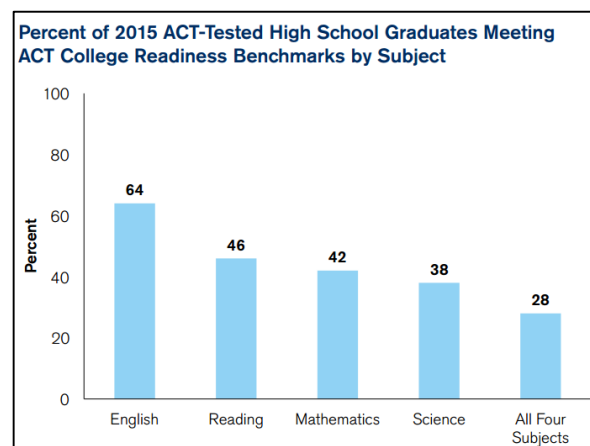


READY OR NOT, HERE THEY COME: ACT and SAT Results Reveal Large Percentages of High School Graduates Unprepared for College

Large percentages of the nation's high school students are graduating from high school unprepared for the rigors of college based on recent results from the nation's two largest college admissions tests. Only 28 percent of 2015 ACT-tested high school graduates met college-readiness benchmarks in each of the four subjects on the ACT (English, reading, math, and science). Results from the College Board were not much better, with 41.9 percent of SAT takers in the Class of 2015 meeting the SAT college- and career-readiness benchmark.

"This should be a wake-up call for our nation," [said ACT Chief Executive Officer Jon Whitmore](#). "We're talking about hundreds of thousands of U.S. high school graduates who won't earn a two- or four-year college degree because they aren't academically prepared to do so. In the increasingly competitive job market, where decent jobs are requiring more advanced skills and training, this is a huge problem."

Among the four subjects that ACT tests, graduates from the Class of 2015 fared best in English, but more than half of those tested fell below ACT's college-readiness benchmark in reading, mathematics, and science. The percentages were little changed from 2014, although the percentage of students meeting all four benchmarks increased slightly from 26 percent to 28 percent. An additional 12 percent of students met three benchmarks.



Nearly one in three (31 percent) 2015 ACT-tested high school graduates failed to meet even one benchmark. According to previous ACT research, fewer than 20 percent of students who meet *none* of the benchmarks are likely to earn a two- or four-year college degree within six years. On the other hand, nearly 60 percent of students who meet at least *three* benchmarks are likely to earn a degree.

As in past years, African American, American Indian, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander students performed dramatically lower than their white and Asian peers. For example, in reading, 75 percent of Asian and 75 percent of white students met the college-readiness benchmark, compared to only 47 percent of Pacific Islanders, 47 percent of Hispanics, 39 percent of American Indians, and 34 percent of African Americans.

"Our nation's most underserved students too often are being neglected, trapped in poor education systems and lacking access to critical information and resources in order to navigate the system," said **ACT President Jon Erickson**. "We simply must do better. It's time to step up our efforts to provide them and all students with quality tools, skills and behaviors that prepare them for success."

The SAT results reveal similar achievement gaps between students. While 61.3 percent of Asian SAT-takers met the SAT college- and career-readiness benchmark and 52.8 percent of white students did so, only 32.7 percent of Native American students, 22.7 percent of Hispanic students, and 16.1 percent of African American students met the benchmark.

Overall, the average SAT score for students in the Class of 2015 was 1490 out of a maximum of 2400, a 7-point drop compared to the previous year and the lowest score since the College Board added a writing section to the test in 2006.

[Washington Post higher education reporter Nick Anderson writes](#) that the “steady decline in SAT scores and generally stagnant results from high schools on federal tests and other measures reflect a troubling shortcoming of education-reform efforts.” He adds that the recent SAT results “show that gains in reading and math in elementary grades haven’t led to broad improvement in high schools ... that means several hundred thousand teenagers, especially those who grew up poor, are leaving school every year unready for college.”

The ACT results are available at <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2015/index.html>.

The SAT results are available at <https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/sat/total-group-2015.pdf>.



GOOD JOBS ARE BACK: New Report Credits Nation’s Economic Growth to High-Wage Jobs Offered to College Graduates

As new and returning college students settle into their dorms this fall, those worried about their future job prospects can breathe a bit easier knowing they stand the best chances of landing the most lucrative positions after graduation.

Since 2010, the economy has added 6.6 million new jobs and the majority—2.9 million—are “good jobs,” which pay more than \$53,000 per year, generally are full time, and most likely offer employment benefits, according to a new report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Furthermore, workers with at least a bachelor’s degree secured 97 percent of those good jobs, according to *Good Jobs Are Back: College Graduates Are First in Line*.

“This has been a weak recovery, but the American job machine is working again for college graduates,” [said Anthony Carnevale, director of the Center on Education and the Workforce](#).

Many media reports claim that growth in low-wage service jobs has propelled most of the nation’s economic recovery since the end of the Great Recession. But the Georgetown report finds the opposite is true.

“The prevailing media notion of recovery dominated by low-wage job growth is greatly overstated,” the report says. “The surge in hiring is not concentrated in dead-end McJobs. If

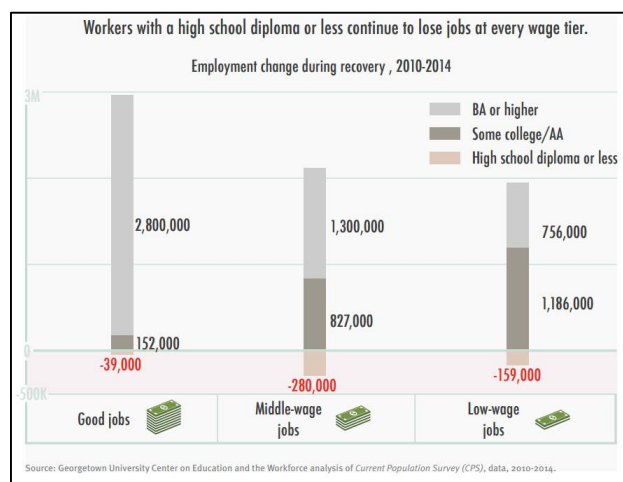
anything, the surge is concentrated at the other end of the scale: in good, high-paying jobs that provide benefits.”

Most media accounts report on job growth trends within *industries*, which lump workers together based on the services or products a company produces, the report explains. That approach groups together everyone working in a specific industry—from a janitor to a chief executive officer—and assigns them the same average salary, regardless of an individual’s position or actual earnings. Consequently, industry analyses fail to distinguish between high- and low-wage opportunities within a given sector. By contrast, the Georgetown report examines growth trends among *occupations*, which classify workers based on specific activities performed on the job.

“[T]he skills required and the wages paid are vastly different among workers who are employed in the same industry, but in different occupations,” the report explains. “Sorting estimates by industry alone, we find, oversimplifies the results, and makes the many types of jobs being created across the economy appear to be lower in quality than they actually are.”

By those measures, “good” high-wage jobs are driving the nation’s economic recovery. Between 2010 and 2014, the economy added 2.9 million high-wage jobs, compared to 1.8 million low-wage jobs, which pay \$32,000 or less per year. “Good jobs now have 1 million more workers than [at the start of the recession] in 2008, while low-wage jobs have 800,000 more workers,” according to the report. During that same time, the economy also added 1.9 million middle-wage jobs, which pay between \$32,000 and \$53,000 per year. The middle-wage tier is still 900,000 jobs short of its prerecession level, though, the report notes.

Having a college degree also offers a certain level of job security during turbulent economic times, according to the Georgetown report. Between 2008 and 2010, college-educated workers saw fewer job losses than workers without degrees, and they have seen greater job gains since that time, the report states. In fact, college-educated workers have *gained* jobs at each of the three income tiers, while individuals with a high school diploma or less have *lost* jobs at every level, as shown in the graph from the report to the right. Even among low-wage jobs, the majority (61 percent) have gone to workers with an associate’s degree or some college, the report notes. Meanwhile, the number of middle- and low-wage jobs filled by individuals with a high school diploma or less declined by 280,000 and 159,000, respectively, between 2010 and 2014.



“The numbers are clear,” the report states, “postsecondary education is important for gaining access to job opportunities in the current economy, and job seekers with Bachelor’s [sic] degrees or higher have the best odds of securing good jobs.”

Most of the new good jobs are in managerial positions (1,781,000), STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) occupations (881,000), and healthcare professional occupations (445,000). The majority of new good jobs also full time (86 percent), offer employer-provided health insurance (68 percent), and provide an employer-sponsored retirement plan (61 percent). Benefits often represent more than 30 percent of an employee's total compensation (beyond salary), and consequently, contribute to a job's overall quality, the report notes.

Although the Georgetown report offers promising news for current college students and recent college graduates, access to the best jobs varies along racial lines despite the economic recovery nationwide. As [reported previously](#) in *Straight A's*, African Americans, and particularly African American men, still encounter multiple social, educational, economic, and environmental barriers that exacerbate the difficulties they traditionally have faced in the job market. Nationwide, the unemployment rate has declined substantially, stabilizing at [5.1 percent in August](#) after peaking at [10 percent](#) in the first few months after the recession, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But the unemployment rate for African Americans has not recovered and increased slightly in August to 9.5 percent, more than twice the rate of whites. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for Latinos was 6.6 percent in August, 2.2 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate for whites (4.4 percent). These figures highlight that although “good” jobs may be in large supply, access to those jobs remains out of reach for large segments of the population.

Good Jobs Are Back: College Graduates Are First in Line is available at <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/goodjobsareback/>.



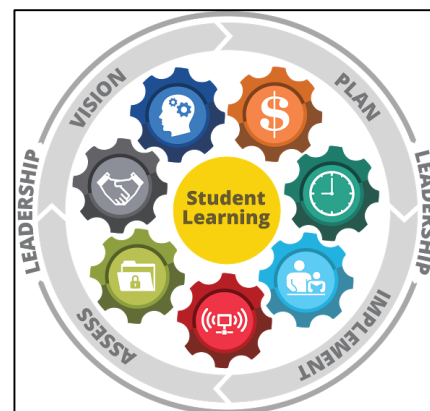
CREATING FUTURE READY SCHOOLS: Massive Open Online Course to Assist School and District Leaders with Digital Learning Transition

[Future Ready Schools](#), which is led by the Alliance for Excellent Education, helps school district leaders nationwide develop and implement sustainable, forward-thinking plans for pairing effective technology deployment with quality teaching. A key component of the effort is the [Future Ready Interactive Planning Dashboard](#), a free online tool to help school districts assess their needs and make data-informed decisions on how to effectively use technology to engage students, empower teachers, and improve learning outcomes.

A related effort, announced last month, is a free massive open online course for educators (MOOC-Ed) on “Leading the Digital Learning Transition: Creating Future Ready Schools.” The course, which is being conducted by the Friday Institute for Educational Leadership at North Carolina State University in partnership with the Alliance, will help participants understand the potential of digital learning in K–12 schools; assess progress and set future goals for their school or district; and develop a plan to achieve their digital learning goals.

The course is designed for school and district leaders, library media specialists, lead teachers, university faculty, consultants, parents, and others involved in planning and implementing K–12 digital learning initiatives.

The course is organized around the Future Ready Schools digital learning framework, which is shown in the graphic to the right. This framework shows the digital learning transition (DLT) “Vision-Plan-Implement-Assess” cycle around the seven DLT planning elements (budget and resources; use of time; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; technology and hardware; data and privacy; community partnerships; and professional learning)—all of which are centered on improving student learning. It also shows, in the outer circle, that leadership is critical throughout the transition process.



The course is open to public, charter, and private schools. It is recommended that individuals sign up as a team from schools, districts, or organizations, but individuals are welcome to participate on their own if a team is not available. However, the course is not intended for individual classroom teachers who are focused on learning how to use technology in their classrooms.

The DLT MOOC-Ed consists of five units scheduled over eight weeks. It begins on September 28 and ends on November 22. For individuals who need more time to complete their work, the course will remain open to complete activities until December 31 and course resources will remain available online until March 31, 2016.

Before beginning the course, it is recommended that teams or individuals complete the optional [Future Ready Schools district assessment survey](#); the information in the survey report will connect the course to participants’ specific school or district.

More information on the MOOC-Ed, including registration information, is available at <https://place.fi.ncsu.edu/course/view.php?id=11>.

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; 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. Follow the Alliance on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/all4ed](https://twitter.com/all4ed)), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).