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StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



LET'S MAKE A DEAL: House and Senate Reach Compromise on NCLB Rewrite, Could Send Bill to President Before End of Year

On November 13, key education leaders in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives announced “a path forward” in their negotiations to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In a [joint statement](#), **House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN) and Ranking Member Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (D-VA)**, along with **Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA)**, expressed optimism that a House-Senate conference committee could “reach agreement on a final bill that Congress will approve and the president will sign.”

Less than one week later, on November 19, their optimism was rewarded as bipartisan members of a House-Senate conference committee voted 38 to 1 to approve a compromise between the House-passed Student Success Act and the Senate-passed Every Child Achieves Act.

“No Child Left Behind has been failing students, parents, teachers, and state and local education leaders for far too long, and today we took an important step in replacing this flawed law,” [said Kline](#), who chaired the conference committee. “But there is still work to be done. We now have to turn this framework into a final bill for our House and Senate colleagues to review. I am confident that once they do, they will see it as an opportunity to replace a failed approach to education with a new approach that will reduce the federal role, restore local control, and empower parents.”

The process to rewrite NCLB, which has stalled on multiple occasions over the last several years, is now expected to move forward at a rapid pace. With the House expected to vote on the compromise on December 2 or 3, and the Senate expected to vote on it during the week of December 7, it is possible that the bill could be on the president’s desk for approval before the end of the year.

In the November 20 episode of “Federal Flash,” the Alliance for Excellent Education’s five-minute video series on important developments in education policy in Washington, DC, **Phillip Lovell, the Alliance’s vice president of policy and advocacy**, acknowledged that a bill written by the Obama administration would “look very different” than the House-Senate compromise, but said Obama would likely sign the compromise should it reach his desk.

“There are several things in the compromise that make the legislation more appealing than the House and Senate’s earlier proposals,” Lovell said. “For example, the conference agreement

includes accountability and support for the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools—a priority for the administration ever since they took office—support for high schools that fail to graduate one-third or more of their students, as well as schools with consistently low-performing groups of students who have been traditionally underserved.”

Lovell noted that the compromise also contains policies favored by Republicans, such as the elimination of a number of federal education programs, as well as new limitations on the U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) authority—a major priority for Republicans, who feel that ED “overstepped its authority in requiring various policies in exchange for its waivers from NCLB,” Lovell said.

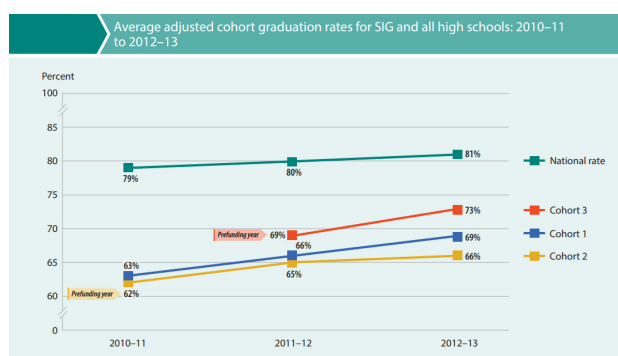


“SIG”N OF IMPROVEMENT?: Federal Report on School Improvement Grants Program Identifies Positive Results for Nation’s Lowest-Performing Schools, Little Change in Others

Schools receiving funds from a federal program targeting the nation’s lowest-performing schools showed mixed results, according to findings released November 12 from the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Overall, schools receiving funds from the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program improved graduation rates at two and three times the national average and increased the percentage of students who were proficient in reading and math at rates faster than other schools. At the same time, however, roughly one-third of SIG schools showed no change or regressed in math and reading proficiency rates.

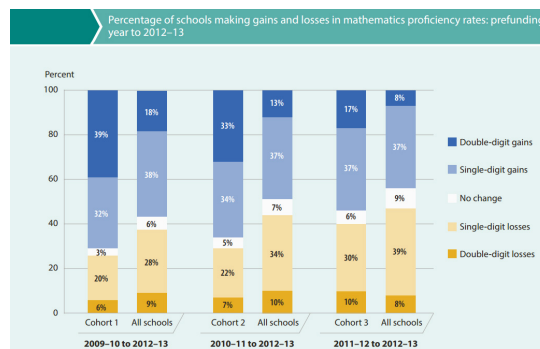
“When searching for a cure for a disease, medical scientists don’t give up when they see progress, but not all they hoped,” [said Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise in a statement](#). “They see it as confirmation for their hard work, roll up their sleeves, and redouble their efforts. [These] results are not perfect; not all SIG schools are improving. The SIG program is not a complete cure for what ails the nation’s lowest-performing high schools, but it is a vitally important program—one of the very few federal programs that targets the toughest cases in the education reform hospital and identifies possible new cures.”

As shown in the graph to the right taken from the report, the first group of SIG schools (Cohort 1) improved their collective graduation rate from 63 percent in School Year (SY) 2010–11 to 69 percent in SY 2012–13, compared to a 2 percentage point gain in the national average. The second and third group of SIG schools increased their collective graduation rates by 4 percentage points. (Click on the image for a larger version.)



Among individual schools, 45 percent of schools in Cohort 1 improved their graduation rates by 6 percentage points or more while 33 percent of schools saw their graduation rates remain roughly unchanged or even decline by more than 2 percentage points. Among Cohort 2 schools, 38 percent improved their graduation rates by 6 percentage points or more while 44 percent saw no change or decreases.

In math, Cohort 1 SIG schools increased the percentage of students reaching proficiency from 32 percent in SY 2009–10 to 40 percent in SY 2012–13—a gain of 8 percentage points, compared to 3 percentage points for the national average. As shown in the graph to the right, approximately 70 percent of Cohort 1 SIG schools made single- or double-digit gains while 26 percent saw single- or double-digit losses, compared to 56 percent and 37 percent, respectively, of schools nationally. (Click on the image for a larger version.)



In reading, Cohort 1 SIG schools increased the percentage of students reaching proficiency from 39 percent in SY 2009–10 to 45 percent in SY 2012–13—a gain of 6 percentage points, compared to 2 percentage points nationally. The percentage of SIG schools in Cohort 1 making single- or double-digit gains (69 percent) was higher than the national average (59 percent) while the percentage of SIG schools seeing declines (28 percent) was lower than the national average (35 percent).

In a [November 12 article](#), *Politico* reporter Caitlin Emma says the SIG results are “mixed” and that the report “[glosses] over some of the shortcomings of the multibillion-dollar [initiative].” She writes that the report excludes a “substantial number of schools from the achievement data analysis because of changes over time in state assessments and other structural changes to schools.” Additionally, she notes that it “doesn’t provide data for the 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years and it doesn’t allow for the comparison of schools that won grants and similarly underperforming schools that didn’t.”

In a [November 3 article](#), Emma examines why some schools made gains while others did not. She focuses on two high schools—one in Miami and one in Chicago—that received millions in SIG funds and followed a similar turnaround strategy. The Miami school made “impressive gains, rebounding in three years from an ‘F’ rating to a ‘B,’” Emma writes. “At the other, less than 10 percent of juniors are proficient at reading, math, and science—the same level as before the grant.” Emma attributes the differing outcomes to the schools’ “readiness to make use of the sudden infusion of money.” Miami, where school officials had prepared for the grants was ready. Chicago, where teachers “fought the program and officials changed almost yearly,” was not.

More information on ED’s report, *School Improvement Grants National Summary: School Year 2012–13*, as well as an accompanying report released on the federal Race to the Top competitive grant program, is available at <http://1.usa.gov/21ceCfk>.



GOV. WISE HONORED: Alliance for Excellent Education President Receives 2015 Friday Medal

Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise received the 2015 Friday Medal, presented by the Friday Institute at North Carolina State’s College of Education, at a ceremony on November 16. The Friday Medal honors significant, distinguished, and enduring contributions

to education and beyond through advocating innovation, advancing education, and imparting inspiration.

“I’m extremely honored to receive this award,” said Wise, shown in the image to the right with **Dr. Glenn Kleiman, executive director of the Friday Institute**. “The Friday Institute continually demonstrates an incredible ability to connect research, policy, and practice to improve educational outcomes, and is a true leader in educational technology. The Institute played a critical role in the launch of the Future Ready Schools initiative, helping school districts across the country plan to use technology in a systematic way. Preparing all students for a successful future means meeting students where they are; the technology and innovations developed, pioneered, and piloted at the Friday Institute allows us to do that.”



Former North Carolina Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., a former recipient of the Friday Medal, made special remarks during the ceremony. “He’s a wonderful leader,” Hunt said of Wise. “If this medal has ever been given to anybody who has worked their head off, and changed education, and kept pushing ... this man is the epitome of that.”

View the full Friday Medal ceremony [here](#).

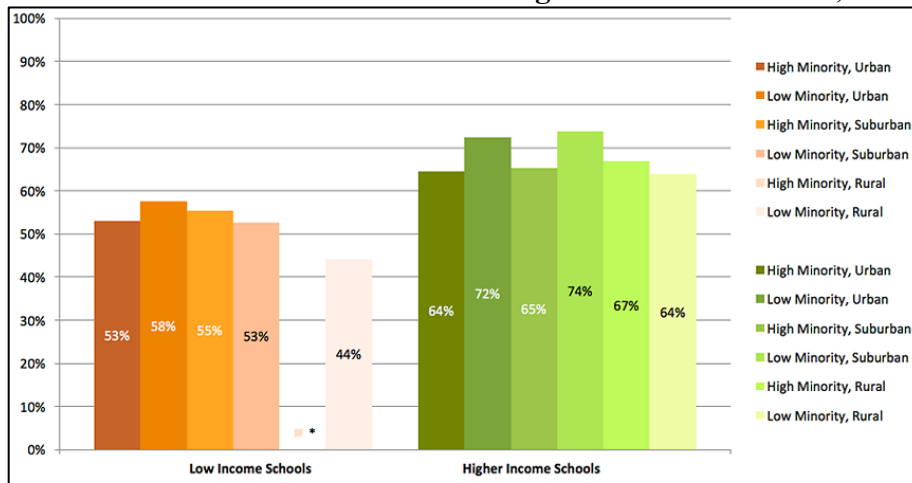


WHO’S GOING TO COLLEGE?: Annual Report Compares College Transition Rates for High School Graduates

Students from low-income high schools—those where at least 50 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch—enroll in college at lower rates than students from high-income high schools, regardless of their geographic location or the number of students of color their schools serve, according to *High School Benchmarks 2015*, an annual report from the National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™ (NSCRC) about high school graduates’ college access, persistence, and completion outcomes. The report compares the college transition rates of students from public noncharter high schools based on various school-level demographic and geographic characteristics, including the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the percentage of students of color served, and school location (rural, suburban, or urban).

In the Class of 2014, between 44 percent and 58 percent of students from low-income high schools (across the various demographic and geographic characteristics analyzed in the report) enrolled in college during the first semester following high school graduation. By contrast, between 64 percent and 74 percent of students from high-income high schools enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation, as the graph from the report shows below. Lower enrollment patterns continued for students from low-income high schools even when researchers included data for students who enrolled in college the spring or summer term following their high school graduations. Furthermore, students from low-income high schools showed lower enrollment trends across multiple types of higher education institutions, enrolling in four-year universities, out-of-state institutions, and private colleges and universities at lower rates than students from high-income high schools, the report notes.

College Enrollment Rates in First Fall After High School Graduation, Class of 2014



Students from low-income high schools also had lower college persistence rates than students from high-income high schools, the report says. Between 73 percent and 82 percent of students from low-income high schools stayed in college after the first year. Persistence rates for students from high-income high schools, meanwhile, ranged from 84 percent to 89 percent.

College completion rates were lower for students from low-income high schools as well; although, students from high-income high schools that served at least 40 percent students of color also had lower completion rates. The six-year college completion rates ranged from 22 percent to 33 percent for graduates from these high schools. Graduates from low-income urban high schools that served at least 40 percent students of color had the lowest completion rate at 22 percent. By comparison, 50 percent of graduates from high-income suburban high schools with few students of color earned a college degree within six years of completing high school—the highest college completion rate of all groups analyzed in the report.

The NSCRC report also highlights variations in the types of college degrees graduates from different high schools earned, exposing wide gaps in the rates at which students earned degrees in various science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. The six-year completion rates for STEM degrees were relatively low among all high school graduates from the Class of 2008, the report notes. But graduates from low-income urban high schools that served high numbers of students of color had the lowest rate—only 6 percent of graduates from these schools completed a STEM-related degree. “The highest percentages of high school graduates who had a degree in a STEM field were from higher income, low minority urban and suburban schools (17 and 16 percent, respectively),” the report says.

Additionally, graduates from low-income high schools and schools that served higher percentages of students of color were more likely to pursue STEM college degrees in psychology and social sciences. By contrast, students from high-income high schools with few students of color pursued more degrees in engineering, mathematics, and the biological and physical sciences, the report notes.

High School Benchmarks 2015 is available at <https://nscresearchcenter.org/hsbenchmarks2015/>.



TEACHSTRONG: Coalition of Forty Organizations Launches Effort to “Modernize and Elevate” Teaching Profession

[Research](#) has established that teacher quality is the most powerful school-based factor in student learning, outweighing students’ social and economic backgrounds in accounting for differences in student achievement. Yet, [students of color](#) and those from [low-income families](#) are most likely to receive the least experienced and least qualified teachers.

A coalition of forty organizations, including the Alliance for Excellent Education (the Alliance), believes that equalizing student access to high-quality teachers requires systemic changes to how the nation recruits, prepares, supports, and compensates teachers. Earlier this month, this diverse group launched TeachStrong, a new campaign organized by the Center for American Progress (CAP) to raise the stature of teaching in the United States.

At the same time, since September, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has approved plans from forty-two states and the District of Columbia designed to ensure that all students have equal access to effective educators. All but two of these approved teacher equity plans, commissioned as part of ED’s [Excellent Educators for All Initiative](#), include provisions to support, strengthen, or modify state teacher preparation programs. Although ED’s Excellent Educators for All Initiative and the TeachStrong campaign are separate endeavors, both efforts demonstrate how policymakers and advocacy organizations are reimagining teacher preparation and career paths to provide students with more equitable access to top educators.

“Collectively, the [TeachStrong] coalition believes that all students, especially those from low-income families, deserve to be taught by great teachers,” according to a CAP [statement](#) about the campaign. “To accomplish this goal, the coalition believes that the United States must modernize and elevate the teaching profession and strengthen the entire teacher career continuum.”

The coalition, which includes teachers unions, teacher voice organizations, education policy leaders, education reform organizations, and civil rights groups, outlines nine principles to guide its efforts. The principles call for deliberate recruitment, stronger training, and higher standards for individuals who want to become teachers, emphasizing a need to diversify the teaching workforce and raise licensure requirements. Once they enter a classroom, teachers need “significantly more time, tools, and support” than they currently receive and more meaningful professional development, according to the TeachStrong principles. New teachers, specifically, need specialized support through induction and teacher residency programs. Additionally, teachers need higher salaries and career pathways that provide advancement opportunities that do not force teachers to leave the classroom. Meanwhile, the coalition wants to ensure that “tenure is a meaningful signal of professional accomplishment” for teachers. During the next year, coalition partners will promote TeachStrong’s nine principles through in-person events in key presidential primary states, online conversations, and social media.

“Through higher standards and expectations, we’re asking more of both teachers and students. But the systems that prepare, train, support, and compensate teachers haven’t been commensurately elevated,” writes **Catherine Brown**, CAP’s **vice president of education policy**, in an [article](#) explaining TeachStrong. “Tremendous consensus exists among our partners

for the need to transform the teacher pipeline ... so that teaching is more on par with medicine and law in terms of its stature in our society.”

That consensus may extend beyond the TeachStrong coalition as well. In October, the Alliance partnered with the National Association of State Boards of Education and the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research to conduct a forum with seven states identified as having exemplary teacher equity plans for ED’s Excellent Educators for All Initiative. Many of the participating states expressed sentiments that echoed the TeachStrong principles. At the forum, “states agreed that establishing teaching as a true profession poses a central challenge in providing equitable educational opportunities for all students,” writes **Mariana Haynes, senior fellow at the Alliance**, in “[Core of the Matter](#),” the Alliance’s blog series on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and struggling students. “That challenge is exacerbated by additional common hurdles including failure to attract strong teacher candidates, low and stagnant salaries, teachers’ inadequate preparation to work with the most challenging students, less desirable working conditions, and fewer opportunities for career advancement.”

As Dr. Haynes notes in her blog post, “[a]ddressing those challenges, though, requires significant changes in teacher preparation and induction, human capital management, and professional learning.” The teacher equity plans approved by ED include a variety of strategies to develop, recognize, and retain effective teachers. Twenty-one state plans include strategies that provide financial or other incentives designed to reward educators for exceptional work and encourage excellent educators to remain in high-need schools. Plans from states like Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, and Missouri, meanwhile, include strategies to improve teacher recruitment and retention. Teacher attrition costs the United States up to \$2.2 billion annually, according to an Alliance [report](#). ED currently is reviewing the remaining eight state plans and will determine which ones to approve on a rolling basis.

“All parents understand that strong teaching is fundamental to strong opportunities for their children. We as a country should treat that opportunity as a right that every family has—regardless of race, ethnicity, or national origin, zip code, wealth, or first language,” **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** says in a [statement](#).

For more information about TeachStrong visit teachstrong.org. Additional information about ED’s Excellent Educators for All Initiative and individual state teacher equity plans is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/resources.html>.

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; Caroline Waldman; 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).