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# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## SEE YOU IN COURT?: Disagreements in Congress Over Implementation of New Education Law

In the weeks since the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law to replace the No Child Left Behind Act, congressional Republicans, especially **Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)**—a former U.S. Secretary of Education—have warned the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to follow the letter of the law when it begins implementing ESSA.

Last week, during an April 12 Senate HELP Committee hearing on ESSA featuring **U.S. Secretary of Education John King**, Alexander told King that ED had overstepped its bounds in some of its proposed regulations around the new education law and warned that consequences could be forthcoming if ED continued its current path.

“Already we’re seeing disturbing evidence that the Department of Education is ignoring the law that the twenty-two members of this committee worked so hard to craft,” Alexander said. “I’m smart enough, and I believe there are others too, to use every power we have to make sure the law is implemented the way we wrote it, including our ability to overturn such rules when they become final, and including using the appropriations process. And if you try to force states to follow these regulations that ignore the law, I’ll encourage them to request a hearing, which they have a right to do with the department. And if they lose, I’ll encourage them to go to court.”

In response, HELP Committee Democrats stressed that the new education law gave ED important oversight to ensure educational equity, especially for students who are traditionally underserved, while making sure that the newfound flexibility granted to states was not abused.

“The Every Student Succeeds Act gives states more flexibility, but it also includes strong federal guardrails for states as they design their accountability systems,” said **Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), the committee’s highest-ranking Democrat**. “While we were writing this law we were deliberate on granting the department the authority to regulate on the law and hold schools and states accountable for education.”

**Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)** agreed. “I voted on this law on the explicit agreement that the Department of Education would enforce its accountability provisions through meaningful regulations,” she said. “That’s clear in the language of the law, and I think it’s also good policy. When the federal government gives the state billions of taxpayer dollars to improve education for our most vulnerable kids then it’s critical that the Department of Education ensure that those states actually use the money to accomplish those ends. This is one of the conditions on which a

lot of senators voted for this law, the condition on which many House Democrats voted for this law, and the condition on which the president of the United States signed this bill into law.”

In a breakfast meeting with reporters the day after the hearing, King “noted that the regulations that irritated Alexander are only a proposal, for a committee of advocates, experts, and educators to consider through a process known as ‘negotiated rulemaking.’” [Education Week reports](#).

Already, ED has held two series of negotiated rulemaking, with the third and final set of meetings scheduled for this week. In advance of those meetings, ED released [revised proposed regulations on April 15](#) relating to assessments and the “supplement not supplant” provision in ESSA that governs the use of Title I funds. If the negotiated rulemaking committee can come to consensus, the agreed-upon regulation will be placed in the Federal Register and made available for public comment by the U.S. Congress and other interested parties. Proposed regulations from the ED on other matters, most notably accountability, are forthcoming.

Video and testimony from the Senate HELP Committee’s April 12 hearing is available at <http://1.usa.gov/1WA3uqL>.



### **FUTURE READY NEW JERSEY: Collection of New Jersey Mayors and School District Superintendents Sign onto Future Ready Schools Effort**

On April 7, mayors from the New Jersey Black Mayors Alliance for Social Justice met with their respective school district superintendents to learn about the new Future Ready New Jersey certification program being developed by a consortia of organizations including the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey School Boards Association, and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. At the event, superintendents took the Future Ready district pledge to implement meaningful changes toward a digital learning transition that supports teachers and addresses the district’s vision for student learning.

Run by the Alliance for Excellent Education in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education and a vast coalition of over fifty national and regional partners, Future Ready Schools helps district leaders plan and implement personalized, research-based digital learning strategies so all students can achieve their full potential.

“It is tremendously important to engage community leaders outside of education, specifically mayors, in the Future Ready planning process,” said **Sara Hall, vice president of policy and advocacy for digital learning at the Alliance for Excellent Education**, who spoke at the event. “Such engagement and partnership, particularly in large urban districts, is vital to ensure that both political and district leadership collaborate to support a community’s children.”

Hall notes that this group of mayors represented large urban areas such as Trenton and Newark, which educate more than 40,000 students from low-income families. “Their vision was clear,” Hall writes in a recent blog post, “to improve student outcomes by personalizing instruction for every student by implementing accelerated high-quality teaching and learning through technology.”

Read Hall’s complete blog post at <http://all4ed.org/?p=27051>.



## **MEANDERING TOWARD GRADUATION: Nearly Half of High School Graduates Are Not Ready for College or a Career, Says New Ed Trust Report**

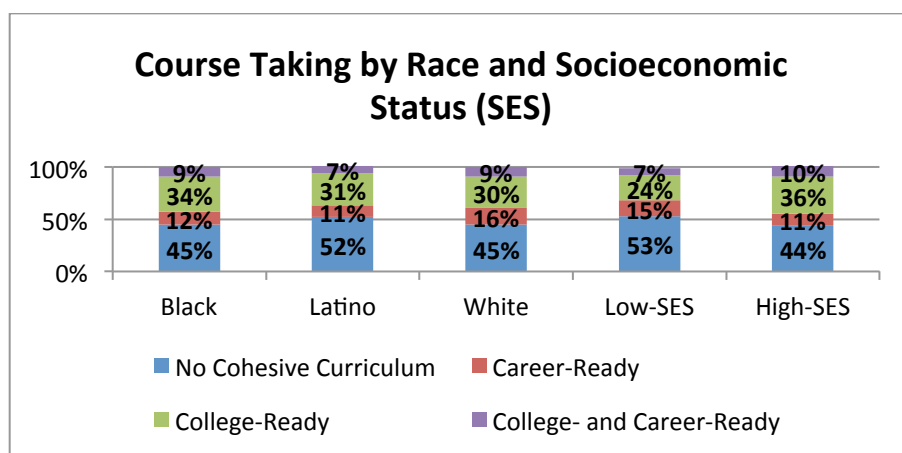
Nearly half of all high school graduates from the Class of 2013 failed to complete a college- or career-ready course of study, according to a new report from the Education Trust (Ed Trust), a national nonprofit advocacy organization. Meanwhile, only 8 percent completed a full college- and career-ready curriculum while only 41 percent completed a college-ready track.

Based on high school transcript data, the report, *Meandering Toward Graduation*, groups students into several categories based on the courses they have completed:

- **College ready:** Four credits of English; three credits of math, including Algebra II; three credits of science, including biology and chemistry or physics; three credits of social studies, including U.S. or world history; and two credits in the same foreign language.
- **Career ready:** Three or more credits in a “broad career field such as health science or business and marketing.”
- **College and career ready:** Includes both college-ready and career-ready sequences.
- **No cohesive curriculum:** Consists of neither the college-ready nor the career-ready sequence.

“High school leaders need to be intentional about getting all students into a rigorous and cohesive course of study,” said **Sonja Brookins Santelises, Ed Trust vice president of K–12 policy and practice**. “But they can’t stop there. They must ensure that all students—especially students of color and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds—have the supports and quality instruction they need to be successful in all of their courses and prepared for life after high school.”

Although the report finds no significant difference between the percentages of white (39 percent), black (43 percent), and Latino (38 percent) students who complete a college-ready or college- and career-ready curriculum, students from low-income families were 14 percentage points less likely to complete these tracks than better advantaged students, as evidenced by the purple and green sections in the graph below. Additionally, Latino students and students from low-income families were significantly more likely to not complete any cohesive curriculum.



In addition to course taking, the report examines grade point average (GPA) to determine how well students are mastering the courses they take. It finds significant gaps between the rate at which white students demonstrate mastery compared to students of color and students from low-income families. Among students who completed a college-ready curriculum, 82 percent of white graduates earned a 2.5 (out of 4.0) GPA or higher, compared with 64 percent of students from low-income families, 63 percent of Latino graduates, and 51 percent of black graduates. “GPA gaps within curriculum categories suggest that students aren’t being afforded equitable preparation, instruction, or support to master material in their courses,” the report notes.

Throughout the report, Ed Trust includes implications for educators and school-based levers for change designed to close some of the gaps between the courses that high school students take and the courses that prepare them for college. For example, it notes that students who were career ready but not college ready took almost seven career and technical education credits yet frequently fell short of college-ready course requirements in math (43 percent), science (54 percent), and foreign language (66 percent).

“Many states don’t require students to take the courses that determine eligibility to attend public colleges,” the report notes. “Foreign language is a good example: It’s required by most public colleges, yet most state policies don’t require it for graduation.”

The report suggests that high school counselors should “ensure that students understand requirements not only for graduation, but also for entry in different postsecondary settings that are aligned with students’ goals.”

*Meandering Toward Graduation* is available at <https://edtrust.org/resource/meandering-toward-graduation/>.



### **NEW EDUCATION MAJORITY: African American and Latino Parents Express Concerns About American Education System’s Ability to Educate Their Children**

Approximately one-third of African Americans and one-quarter of Latinos believe that schools in the United States are not really trying to educate African American and Latino children, according to results from a new poll from the Leadership Conference Education Fund (Education Fund)—the education and research arm of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

The poll’s results are captured in *New Education Majority: Attitudes and Aspirations of Parents and Families of Color*, a report that recognizes that students of color now make up the majority in the nation’s public schools. It shares the opinions that African American and Latino parents and families have about the education of their children, referred to in the report as the “new education majority,” as well as the American education system as a whole.

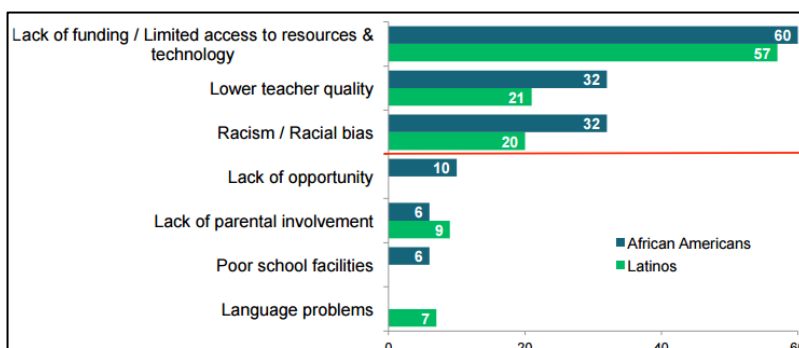
“In our work in communities, we have found that the education debates conducted inside the Beltway—from testing and No Child Left Behind to Common Core and the appropriate role of the federal government—don’t resonate with new education majority parents or reflect the priorities they have for their own families,” writes **Wade Henderson, president and chief**

**executive officer of the Education Fund**, in the introduction to the report. “The truth is, these debates have simply failed them. New education majority parents and families know what schools are and are not doing for their children, and they have very clear beliefs about what should be done.”

The report includes four key takeaways, finding that new education majority parents and families

- are well aware of the impact that racial inequities in education have on children of color;
- want a public education system that provides academic rigor, safety, and great teachers above all;
- want schools to set high expectations for African American and Latino students, and want expectations for students from low-income families to be just as high; and
- believe they have a great deal of power to change the education system and are willing to do their part, but they also believe that all levels of government must step up to address funding and other disparities that harm African American and Latino students.

Poll results show that 66 percent of African Americans and 45 percent of Latinos believe that students in their communities do not receive as good an education as white students do—this sentiment is even higher among African American and Latinos whose children attend mostly low-income schools. Among those who see racial disparities in education, 60 percent of African Americans and 57 percent of Latinos say that a lack of funding and limited access to resources and technology is a culprit. Lower teacher quality, racism or racial bias, and a lack of parental involvement were also cited by both communities as culprits, as shown in the image below taken from the report.



When it comes to rigor, 90 percent of African Americans and 84 percent of Latinos say that students “should be challenged more to help ensure they are successful later in life.” Additionally, 90 percent of African Americans and Latinos believe that expectations for students from low-income families should be the same or even higher than those of other students.

“[The Every Student Succeeds Act] creates new opportunities and incentives to fully and adequately address the failure of our schools to educate all children, but only if we can build the public and political will to do so,” Henderson writes. “We cannot continue to sustain two separate and unequal education systems—one that educates white and middle-class children fairly well and one that absolutely fails children of color—and hope to maintain our status as the most powerful and diverse economy in the world. We believe that education policy in the twenty-first century must vigorously drive toward equity. Decisionmakers have to recognize that policy must reflect the perceptions, needs, desires, and beliefs of communities of color to be able to effectively address the actual educational needs of the majority of students.”

The report offers recommendations for how education policymakers and advocates can better account for the perspectives of parents of students of color, which consist of

- meaningfully engaging them in education policy discussion, debate, and practice to ensure that policy truly reflects the needs of new education majority students and the expectations of communities of color; and
- developing policy that meaningfully addresses the concerns that new education majority parents and families have about the quality of their children’s school and teachers, the inequitable distribution of resources, and the expectations that the school has of their children’s capacity to excel.

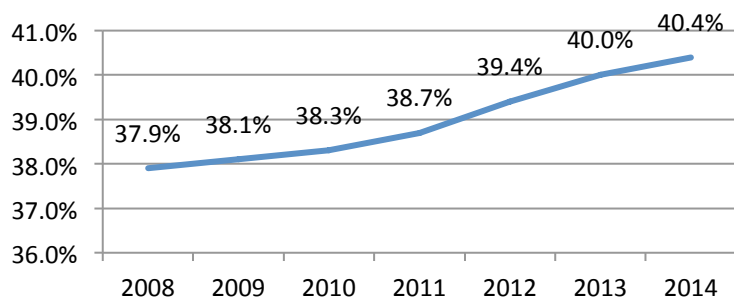
*New Education Majority: Attitudes and Aspirations of Parents and Families of Color* is based on the results of a national survey conducted by Anzalone Liszt Grove Research on behalf of the Education Fund representing 400 African American and 400 Latino or Hispanic parents or family members actively involved in the upbringing of a child between five and eighteen years old. *New Education Majority: Attitudes and Aspirations of Parents and Families of Color* is available at <http://NewEducationMajority.org>.



## **GOOD BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH: College Degree Attainment Rises But Not On Track to Meet Lumina Foundation’s 2025 Goal of 60 Percent**

The U.S. degree attainment rate—the percentage of Americans aged twenty-five to sixty-four with a two- or four-year degree—is on the rise, but it is not at the pace necessary to meet a goal that 60 percent of Americans hold degrees, certificates, or high-quality credentials by 2025, according to the most recent of the Lumina Foundation’s annual *A Stronger Nation* report.

**Percentage of 25- to 64-Year-Olds with a Two- or Four-Year College Degree**



The degree attainment rate, which is based on U.S. Census Bureau data, increased from 37.9 percent in 2008 to 40.4 percent in 2014, representing more than 4.2 million additional Americans with college degrees. The rate of increase was faster among twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds, rising from 37.8 percent in 2008 to 42.3 percent in 2014—a finding the report says “bodes well for further increases in the overall rate of attainment” but not enough to meet the 2025 goal.

In addition to reporting the attainment rate of two- and four-year degree holders, the Lumina Foundation was able to measure the number of Americans with “high-quality postsecondary certificates”<sup>1</sup> for the first time, pegging it at 4.9 percent and reporting that the nation’s overall

<sup>1</sup> Lumina obtained this data through a survey administered by NORC at the University of Chicago that included only individuals who reported they were employed in the field in which the certificate was awarded.



postsecondary attainment rate is 45.3 percent. The new data is based on a nationally representative sample of working-age men and women—those aged twenty-five to sixty-four.

“The secret to individual and societal success is talent—the knowledge, skills, and abilities of our citizens—but right now, our nation lacks sufficient talent to meet the demands of the global job market,” [said Jamie Merisotis, president and chief executive of Lumina Foundation.](#)

“Many of those who see education beyond high school as valuable and essential aren’t able to attain postsecondary credentials in today’s environment. Closing that gap, or increasing attainment equity is an economic imperative, and will require a shift in the way we think about higher education to include and better serve non-traditional learners.”

When broken down by population group, the data reveals large disparities in degree attainment. Asian/Pacific Islanders have the highest degree attainment rate (60.6 percent), but then there is a large drop to whites (45.1 percent), and then another large drop to African Americans (28.7 percent), Native Americans (23.7 percent), and Hispanics (20.9 percent). The report says that serving African American, Native American, and Hispanic individuals better is “essential to increasing attainment rates overall” and meeting the 2025 goal.

The report also provides data for every state, every county, and the 100 largest metro areas. The states with the highest and lowest percentages of residents aged twenty-five to sixty-four with a quality postsecondary credential appear in the table below.

| State         | Percentage | State         | Percentage |
|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| Massachusetts | 55.4%      | West Virginia | 32.6%      |
| Colorado      | 54.2%      | Nevada        | 35.3%      |
| Connecticut   | 53.2%      | Mississippi   | 36.4%      |
| Minnesota     | 52.9%      | Alabama       | 36.7%      |
| Washington    | 51.6%      | Idaho         | 37.7%      |
| Virginia      | 50.6%      | Arkansas      | 38.8%      |
| New Jersey    | 50.1%      | Tennessee     | 39.3%      |

Among metro areas, Washington, DC/Arlington-Alexandria, VA (55.7 percent), Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA (55.1 percent), San Francisco–Oakland-Hayward, CA (54.0 percent), Minneapolis–St. Paul–Bloomington, MN (52.0 percent), and Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA (49.5 percent) have the highest degree attainment rates.

*A Stronger Nation 2016*, including individual policy briefs for all fifty states, is available at [https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger\\_nation2016.](https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger_nation2016)

***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](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)).