



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



GOING DOWN: Senate Appropriations Committee Passes Bipartisan Education Spending Bill, Cuts Funding by \$220 Million

A spending bill passed by the Senate Appropriations Committee on June 9 would fund the U.S. Department of Education at \$67.8 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, a \$220 million decrease from FY 2016. The bill, the FY 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, passed by a bipartisan vote of 29–1.

“This is the first bipartisan Senate Labor-HHS bill in seven years, and I want to thank Senator [Patty] Murray for her work on this bill. The bill eliminates more than a dozen duplicative or unnecessary federal programs in addition to the eighteen from last year’s bill, and is \$270 million less than last year,” [said U.S. Senator Roy Blunt \(R-MO\), chairman of the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee](#). Blunt highlighted a change to Pell Grants that would expand eligibility and flexibility for an estimated 1 million students.

The bill would provide \$11.95 billion—a \$40 million increase—for special education and \$15.4 billion for Title I grants to local school districts, which serves disadvantaged students. These grants represent a \$500 million increase over last year and include funding for school improvement that is now consolidated within Title I. The Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG) program¹—a new block grant program created under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—would receive only \$300 million, less than the \$500 million that President Obama proposed for the program in his budget and much less than the \$1.65 billion authorized by ESSA.

Earlier this year, two key architects of the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act, **House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline** and **U.S. Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA), the committee’s top Democrat**, sent a [letter to the leadership of the House Appropriations Committee](#) urging appropriators to allocate “at least the full \$1.65 billion” for the SSAEG program “to allow for adequate formula distribution to states and to school districts consistent with the statute.”

In a [statement](#), **U.S. Senator Patty Murray, top Democrat on the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee**, acknowledged that she and Blunt worked under “very tight budget caps” and expressed hope that Republicans and Democrats can work together to “restore additional investments in defense and non-defense priorities, which would allow us to improve this bill with additional resources for education and other priorities.”

¹ The SSAEG program has three purposes: (1) provide all students with access to a well-rounded education; (2) improve school conditions for student learning; and (3) improve the use of technology to raise academic achievement and digital literacy for all students. If a district receives less than \$30,000 in SSAEG funds, the district may choose to support only one of these purposes.

The next steps for the bill are unclear at this point. The U.S. House of Representatives has yet to unveil its version of the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. **House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK)** said that his subcommittee will likely vote on the bill by the end of the month, followed by possible consideration by the full House Appropriations Committee in early July. Cole was less optimistic that the bill would make it to the House floor for a vote.

FY 2017 begins October 1, but House Republicans are already talking about a temporary funding mechanism, called a continuing resolution (CR), that would maintain this year's funding levels until the Congress passes a final spending bill, which probably would not happen until after the election. Because a CR would reflect funding decisions made prior to ESSA's passage, it is unclear how funding would be allocated for the new or consolidated programs created under ESSA.



ENSURING EQUITY IN ESSA: More than Half of U.S. States Risk Ignoring Academic Needs of Many Students, New Alliance for Excellent Education Report Finds

The academic needs of large numbers of African American and Latino students, students from low-income families, English language learners, students with disabilities, and other groups of traditionally underserved students in twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia could be ignored under a new proposal from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), according to a new report by the Alliance for Excellent Education (the Alliance).

Under [ED's May 26 proposal](#), states are given wide discretion in how they decide what number of students in these categories, or "subgroups," will trigger improvement actions for low academic performance. If this number, referred to as "n-size," is set too high, schools are not required to provide the resources that these subgroups of traditionally underserved students need to succeed.

"A high n-size could mean 'no action' for many students, especially students of color and students from low-income families who make up roughly half of all K-12 students yet graduate from high school at rates much lower than other students," said **Alliance President Bob Wise**. "A state with a high n-size will not notice when a particular group of students underperforms or fails to graduate from high school. As a result, no action will be taken and no resources will go to the school to help the students who are falling behind."

For example, if a state sets its n-size at thirty and a school has twenty-nine African American students in a specific grade, that subgroup does not exist in the school's accountability system. If the graduation rate for that group of African American students is significantly lower than that of the entire school, a glaring achievement gap exists without requirements for action.

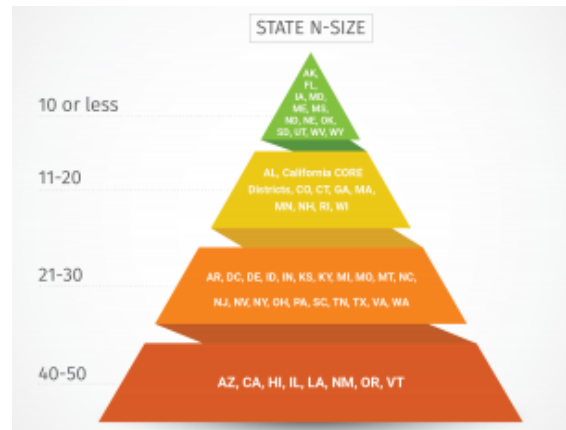
The Alliance report, *Ensuring Equity in ESSA: The Role of N-Size in Subgroup Accountability*, recommends that states set their n-size at ten or fewer students, a number it says allows states to effectively identify and support underserved students while staying true to the civil rights imperative inherent within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the nation's new education law that replaced the No Child Left Behind Act.

Currently, however, only thirteen states set an n-size of ten or fewer students, the report finds. As shown in the graphic below, nine states and California's nine CORE districts, which include the

state's largest school districts, set the n-size between eleven and twenty students. (For a larger version of the graphic, visit http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/N-SizePyramid_FINAL.png.)

Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia set their n-size at twenty-one or more students. Of those twenty-eight states, eight set an n-size at forty or more students—*three times higher* than the recommendation made in the report.

Under proposed rules that ED released in late May, states would be permitted to set any n-size they want, but if it is larger than thirty, the state must include the number and percentage of schools that will not be held accountable for the performance of students in a particular subgroup.



“An n-size of thirty is too high,” said Wise. “The U.S. Department of Education should immediately reevaluate its proposal and consider setting an n-size no higher than ten—a number that would allow states to protect student privacy and also produce valid, reliable, and actionable information on student subgroup performance. Without such a change from the federal government, individual states should take it upon themselves to set their n-size at ten students or fewer as they consider changes to their accountability and improvement systems. Efforts to close achievement gaps must include lowering n-size.”

Ensuring Equity in ESSA outlines several positive examples where states lowered their n-size and were able to identify and support substantially more schools and students. For example:

- California CORE districts use an n-size of twenty students—much lower than the state’s n-size of fifty—and were able to include an additional 150,000 students in their accountability and support systems.
- When Virginia lowered its n-size by twenty, the number of schools responsible for the performance of African American students increased from roughly 350 to 450. Similarly, the number of schools accountable for the performance of Latino students increased from approximately 120 to 180 and for students with disabilities from 105 to nearly 400.
- Several small, rural states have also taken steps to include more students. Wyoming has an n-size of six and Alaska lowered its n-size from twenty-six to five within the last two years.

Setting an n-size at ten or fewer students would ensure that states capture the greatest number of schools for reporting, accountability, and improvement purposes under ESSA. By including these schools in their accountability and improvement systems, the schools become eligible for school improvement funding and direct student services under the law.

Download *Ensuring Equity in ESSA: The Role of N-Size in Subgroup Accountability* at <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/n-size/>.



FALLING FURTHER BEHIND: Two Reports Highlight Growing Gaps in College Preparation and Postsecondary Success for American Indian and Alaska Native Students

American Indian and Alaska Native students are less prepared for college and less likely to enroll in postsecondary education than their white peers, according to separate reports from ACT and the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest. The ACT report, *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015: American Indian Students*, examines the college readiness of American Indian students nationally. In a separate report, *Alaska Students' Pathways from High School to Postsecondary Education and Employment*, REL Northwest analyzes the postsecondary education and work outcomes of high school students in Alaska.

The ACT report finds that American Indian students have the second lowest rate of college readiness among student racial/ethnic groups, as measured by achievement of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks in English, reading, math, and science.

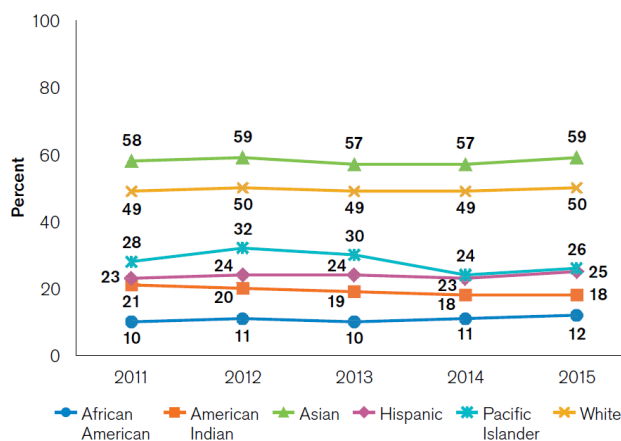
“The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses,” according to the report.

While 84 percent of American Indian students who took the ACT hope to attain an associate's degree or higher, only 18 percent of American Indian students achieved the college-ready benchmark on three or more tests compared to 50 percent of white students and 59 percent of Asian students. (See the graph from the report to the right.) American Indian students outperformed only one racial group—African American students. Only 12 percent of African American students who took the ACT in 2015 achieved three or more college-ready benchmarks.

Moreover, the percentage of American Indian students achieving three or more college-ready benchmarks declined 3 points since reaching a five-year high of 21 percent in 2011, according to the ACT report. Similarly, the percentage of students reaching the college-ready benchmark on the individual subject tests declined. In 2015, 39 percent of American Indian students met the college-ready benchmark in English and 26 percent met the benchmark in reading, down from 47 percent and 36 percent, respectively, in 2011. Math performance for American Indian students also declined from 25 percent in 2011 to 20 percent in 2015. The percentage of American Indian students meeting the science college-ready benchmark increased slightly from 15 percent in 2011 to 18 percent in 2015.

“Educational planning, monitoring, and interventions must be better aligned to help students realize their aspirations,” write **Marten Roorda**, chief executive officer of ACT, and **Ahniwake Rose**, executive director of the National Indian Education Association, at the beginning of the ACT

Percent of 2011–2015 ACT-Tested High School Graduates Meeting Three or More Benchmarks by Race/Ethnicity*



report. “[C]ollege access can be strengthened by increasing the programmatic capacity of local agencies to design, implement, and operate more effective academic and evaluation practices that support Native student learning.”

The ACT report highlights the disconnect between the postsecondary aspirations of American Indian students and their preparation for success after high school. The REL Northwest study, meanwhile, examines actual postsecondary outcomes for Alaska Native students in their home state, identifying the characteristics and conditions associated with differences in their education and employment success.

REL Northwest finds that disparities in academic achievement, high school graduation status, and economic disadvantage contribute to disparities in college enrollment rates between white and Alaska Native students. The researchers examined the postsecondary outcomes for approximately 40,000 Alaska students who left high school between School Year (SY) 2004–05 and SY 2007–08.

Among the cohorts studied, only 21 percent of Alaska Native students enrolled in either a two- or four-year college immediately after high school versus 41 percent of white students. But when researchers compared Alaska Native students and white students with similar characteristics and circumstances, they found that both groups of students had similar probabilities of enrolling in college immediately after high school. In fact, when the researchers controlled for differences in academic achievement, high school graduation status, and socioeconomic status, the gap in college enrollment rates between Alaska Native and white students dropped from a 20 percentage-point gap to a 6 percentage-point gap, according to the REL Northwest study.

“This means that Alaska Native and white students with similar characteristics who come from similar circumstances tend to make similar choices,” the report explains. “It also suggests that an unequal distribution of various experiences within racial/ethnic groups—for example, living in poverty or graduating from high school—can in part account for why a larger share of white students than Alaska Native students chose to enroll immediately in college.”

Alaska Native students in the study had a lower high school graduation rate than white students (53 percent versus 72 percent) and a higher rate of qualification for free or reduced-price lunch (71 percent for Alaska Native students compared to 27 percent for white students).

“This finding suggests that if we were able to resolve some economic and educational disparities, we would expect to see the numbers of students pursuing higher education rise, especially for currently underrepresented groups,” **Havala Hanson, coauthor of the REL Northwest study**, says in a [statement](#).

This gap in college enrollment could impact students’ employment and economic success as well. The REL Northwest study finds that students who “attained higher levels of education tended to have higher employment rates and earn higher wages,” the report says. Among all Alaska students, those who earned a four-year college degree had the highest employment rate of 79 percent, while students who left high school without a diploma had the lowest employment rate at 62 percent. Similarly, high school graduates earned \$5,800 more per year than high school dropouts, while individuals with a two-year degree earned \$13,800 more and individuals with a four-year degree earned \$9,300 more than high school dropouts.

On average, white students earned \$5,100 more per year than Alaska Native students, the report says. But “[w]hen comparing Alaska Native and White students who achieved the same level of education, the difference in wages decreased in most cases,” the report says. In fact, among students who earned a four-year college degree, Alaska Native students earned \$100 *more* per year than white students. The exception was among students who earned a two-year college degree, where the wage gap was the widest. Alaska Native students with a two-year college degree earned \$14,200 *less* per year than similarly educated white students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act includes several provisions that target the educational needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students. To learn more, view the Alliance’s fact sheet or watch a special edition of the Alliance’s five-minute Federal Flash at <http://all4ed.org/essa/#AmericanIndian>.

Download ACT’s report, *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015: American Indian Students*, at <http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCCR-2015-AmericanIndian.pdf>.

REL Northwest’s report, *Alaska Students’ Pathways from High School to Postsecondary Education and Employment*, is available at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=336>.



PAYING DIVIDENDS: Wages and Job Success for “High Credentialed” High School Graduates Compare Favorably with Outcomes for Bachelor’s Degree Holders, According to New Report

High school graduates who enter the workforce directly instead of attending college can achieve similar and, in some cases, greater economic and social success than college goers, provided those graduates received a rigorous education during their high school years. In fact, such highly prepared high school graduates fare better than students who attend a two- or four-year college but do not earn a degree, according to a new report from the Center for Public Education (CPE), a policy research initiative of the National School Boards Association.

The report, *The Path Least Taken III: Rigor and Focus in High School Pays Dividends in the Future*, focuses on a group of high school graduates the authors describe as “high credentialed,” those who earned at least a C+ grade point average; completed Algebra II, advanced biology, and at least three career and technical education courses in a specific labor market area; and obtained a professional certification or license.

While, individually, each of these factors contributed to students’ later work and life success, “they were especially powerful in combination,” the report explains. “Compared to their peers, who lacked any of these characteristics, the *high credentialed* non-college [sic] goers achieved comparable, and sometimes, better employment and social outcomes.”

The report’s findings come from an analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002 and the ELS Postsecondary Transcript dataset, which tracked a nationally representative sample of high school sophomores from 2002 through 2012.

At age twenty-six, high credentialed high school graduates who did not enroll in college earned nearly as much (\$18.71 per hour) as individuals with a bachelor’s degree (\$19.38 per hour), the report says. In fact, high credentialed high school graduates earned higher wages than other

individuals who did not attend college, individuals who attended but did not complete college, and individuals who earned only an associate's degree, the report says.

Additionally, the high credentialed high school graduates were as likely as bachelor's degree holders to work full time and feel satisfied with their jobs and more likely to have employer-provided medical insurance, as the graph from the report shows to the right. They also were as likely as bachelor's degree holders to register to vote and actually cast a ballot in an election, the report notes.

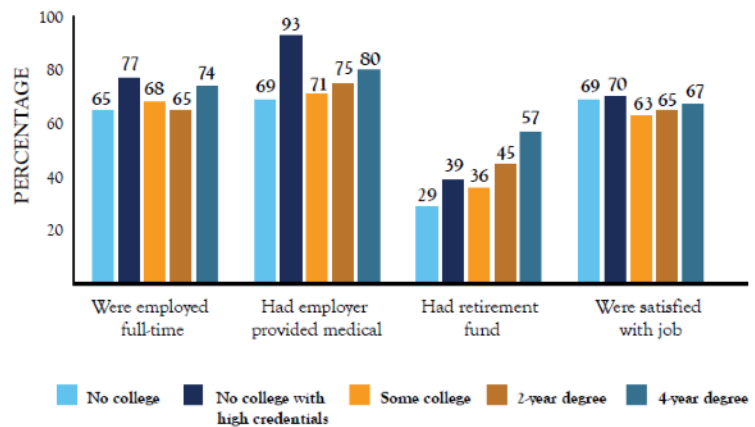
High credentials had the greatest impact on noncollege goers, the CPE report notes. But students who attended college but did not earn a degree also fared better if they had earned high credentials while in high school. Among individuals who started college but did not finish, those who had earned high credentials while in high school earned higher wages and were more likely to work full time. By age twenty-six, typical noncompleters from two-year colleges earned \$13.71 per hour, but those who had secured high credentials in high school earned \$16.79 per hour. Similarly, typical noncompleters from four-year colleges earned \$14.86 per hour, while those who were high credentialed in high school earned \$16.04 per hour.

"*The Path Least Taken* series provides more evidence that the same academic preparation that leads to success in college can also lead to success in the workplace," says **Naomi Dillon, CPE's managing editor and coauthor of the report**. "High schools that make sure all students take rigorous courses, particularly high-level math and science, and provide access to vocational sequences in a specific labor market area will go far toward setting students up to meet the challenges of the future, no matter where they ultimately end up."

The Path Least Taken III: Rigor and Focus in High School Pays Dividends in the Future is available at www.centerforpubliceducation.org/thepathleاستtakenIII.

Economic outcomes of high school graduates at age 26 by education attainment

High school graduates without college but with high credentials fare as well economically as four-year degree holders at age 26 with one exception – they are less likely to have a retirement fund.



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).