



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



CONGRESS TO BEGIN ESEA REAUTHORIZATION: In Joint Statement, House Democrats and Republicans Outline Plans for a Bipartisan Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

In a statement released on February 18, the Democratic and Republican leaders of the House Education and Labor Committee announced plans for a bipartisan reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), current known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

“Today, we’re announcing a bipartisan, open and transparent effort to rewrite No Child Left Behind—a law that we all agree is in need of major reform,” the statement read. “It will start with a series of hearings in the coming weeks to explore the challenges and opportunities ahead as we work to ensure an excellent education is available to every student in America. With a real commitment to innovation, we invite all stakeholders who share our serious interest in building a world-class education system to email us their suggestions.”

The statement was released jointly by **Representatives George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, John Kline (R-MN), senior Republican on the committee, Dale Kildee (D-MI), chairman of the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, and Mike Castle, senior Republican on the subcommittee.**

According to the statement, the committee’s [first hearing will be on February 24](#) and will focus on expanding access to quality charter schools.

The statement comes on the heels of a January 20 meeting organized by the White House and **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** that brought together key Republicans and Democrats to begin developing a road map for revising the law, according to the [Washington Post](#). After participating in the meeting, Representative Castle, said the meeting “couldn’t have been more bipartisan.”

In a [commentary published last month](#), **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, observed that education is the one major endeavor in which Republicans and Democrats have largely avoided creating partisan divides.

“Health care deliberations have not been the Congress’s finest moment,” Wise wrote. “Bare-knuckle partisanship dominates other significant issues. The familiar issues around ESEA provide both parties the opportunity to demonstrate that they can work together when it comes to improving opportunities for children. Every incumbent heading home for a tough reelection campaign wants to be able to show a positive accomplishment that everyone feels good about.”

President Obama Announces Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge

On February 18, President Obama announced a new Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge open to all public high schools around the country. The winning high school will have President Obama deliver the commencement address to the Class of 2010.

“Graduation is an important moment for anyone,” the president said in a [video airing on the White House’s website](#). “But a high school diploma is also important to our success as a nation.”

According to the guidelines of the challenge, schools are encouraged to show how they are “making great strides” on personal responsibility, academic excellence, and college readiness. The application consists of four essay questions that focus on demonstrating how the high school is helping prepare students to meet the president’s goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

High school principals must submit applications no later than March 15 and each school may submit only one application. More information on the challenge, including the application form, is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/commencement>.



THE ONLINE LEARNING IMPERATIVE: New Alliance Brief Says Online Learning Can Combat “Perfect Storm” of Teacher Shortages, State Budget Shortfalls, and Low Student Achievement

A new brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education details how the integral use of online technology in today’s secondary school classrooms can strengthen the teacher workforce, improve student outcomes, and allow states to do more despite flat education budgets.

“Just as the internet has transformed how people receive information, interact, and conduct business, online education can positively revamp how students learn, whether by offering advanced coursework or by delivering a wide range of educational tools,” said Alliance President Bob Wise, who authored the report. “Education has trailed most other sectors in effectively applying new technologies to boost productivity and outcomes, but now is the time to move from thinking about technology as an add-on tool to ensuring that it is integrated into all educational settings.”

According to the brief, *The Online Learning Imperative: A Solution to Three Looming Crises in Education*, state and local public officials are faced with stark realities that will force major changes in traditional education processes, especially for middle and high schools. This educational “perfect storm” includes:

- **Global skill demands vs. educational achievement.** At present, the nation cannot meet President Obama’s goals for college completion without dramatically improving the quality of learning in secondary schools. Even improving high school graduation rates will not result in achieving much greater postsecondary achievement unless students are better prepared in high school.
- **The funding cliff.** The current recession will not permit continued education spending increases for most states. As a result, state policymakers and education leaders will be challenged with raising student performance while dealing with tightening budgets.

- **Looming teacher shortages.** Placing high performing teachers in thousands of low performing classrooms becomes even more difficult due to large-scale retirements of experienced teachers in the coming years as well as low retention rates for new educators.

“To overcome these obstacles, the nation’s education system cannot continue to conduct business as usual,” said Wise. “Online learning offers one solution to these crises. Whether used in a virtual school or a classroom, it is a smart investment for states facing budget dilemmas. If there is a shortage of quality teachers, technology can help fill that gap by granting students in Pensacola access to effective teachers in Palm Beach, Portland, or even Paris. Teachers can also build their networks of support and advance in their profession by connecting with board certified ‘virtual coaches’ and other online resources.”

According to *The Online Imperative*, whether the setting is a virtual school or blending online instruction with a teacher in a classroom, student learning shows improvement. The brief cites a 2009 U.S. Department of Education study that found students who took all or part of their classes online did better than students in face-to-face classrooms, and that the advantage was stronger in blended classrooms than in online-only classrooms. The Alliance brief also argues that policymakers can reasonably hold online educators to higher learning standards than they can traditional educators.

With almost every state facing budget shortfalls, the Alliance brief also points to how online instruction can positively affect the states’ financial bottom lines and student performance. For example, rather than paying three Chinese language instructors to teach a limited number of students in three different schools, one instructor could teach all the students through online instruction and students would no longer be bound by rigid time schedules.

To read the full report, visit <http://www.all4ed.org/files/OnlineLearning.pdf>.



AP REPORT TO THE NATION: Equity Gap Persists in Participation in and Student Performance on the Advanced Placement Test

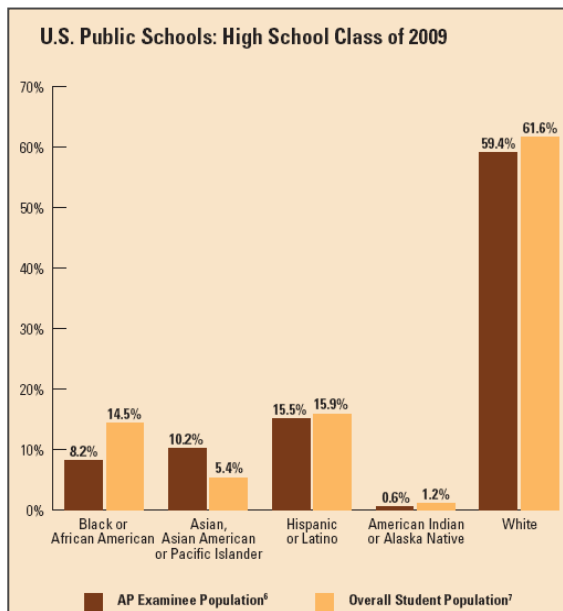
The College Board’s annual report summarizing student performance on the Advanced Placement (AP) test found that despite an increase in the number of students participating in and experiencing success on the test, the equity and excellence gaps between white and minority students persist.

“Through the dedication of educators and others across the country, we are making progress toward the goal of having AP classes reflect the diversity of America’s students, but the disparity still exists,” said **Trevor Packer, the College Board’s vice president responsible for leadership of the Advanced Placement Program.** “We need to ensure that all students are provided with the kind of academic experiences that can prepare them for the rigors of AP and college.”

According to *The 6th Annual AP® Report to the Nation*, more minority students participated in AP courses and testing in 2009 than in 2008. However, the overall number of minority students participating in AP is still considerably low, particularly in comparison to white students.

As demonstrated in the chart to the right, African American students represent 14.5 percent of the 2009 public school graduating class but only 8.2 percent of the AP examinee population.¹ The trend is consistent, but the disparity is not as wide among other minority groups. For example, Hispanic students represent 15.9 percent of the 2009 graduating class and 15.5 percent of the AP examinee population.

The College Board also examined the overall percentage of minority students in a state’s 2009 high school graduating class and compared it to the percentage of minority students in a state’s graduating class that scored a “3” or higher on the AP Exam. The College Board chose 3 because it represents the score that research finds predictive of college success and college graduation.



Using this comparison, the report identifies states experiencing equity and excellence gaps. These gaps occur when a subgroup—traditionally minority students—makes up a smaller percentage of the successful student group than the student group represents in an overall graduating class. According to the analysis, eighteen states have closed the equity and excellence gap for American Indian students; sixteen states have closed the equity gap for Hispanic students; and two states have closed the equity gap for African American students. However, by not factoring in the Hispanic students whose only AP Exam score of 3 or higher was on the Spanish Language Exam, the actual number of states that have eliminated the equity gap for Hispanics is six.

In an effort to address these achievement gaps, the College Board, in 2005, partnered with the National Governors Association for Best Practices Center to support fifty-one pilot schools in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, and Wisconsin in expanding AP courses to minority and low-income students. *The 6th Annual AP® Report to the Nation* details the results of this effort and finds that in two years, the number of students taking AP courses in these pilot schools rose by 65 percent, and the number of minority and low-income students participating in AP more than doubled.

The report also finds that only 15.9 percent of the public school graduating Class 2009 that participated in AP earned a score that indicated they were ready for college and careers. Overall, only 26.5 percent of high school students participated in the AP Exam in 2009, which is an increase of 6.6 percent since 2004, but indicates that much more work is needed to ensure that all students have access to these higher-level courses and exams.

To read the full report, visit http://www.collegeboard.com/html/aprtn/pdf/ap_report_to_the_nation.pdf.

¹ The data in the report only represents public school students since current, reliable racial demographic data for nonpublic schools is not available in all states.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: States Make Due with Massive Budget Deficits

MICHIGAN: Granholm Announces Restoration of Michigan Promise Scholarship

During her [state of the state address](#) on February 3, **Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm (D)** outlined the impact that the recession has had on Michigan's economy.

"Our world has changed, utterly," Granholm said. "The old Michigan economy is gone ... GM, Chrysler, and over fifty suppliers declared bankruptcy. A million Michigan jobs lost over the last decade. Record foreclosures. The worst national economic downturn since the Great Depression. And Michigan was at the epicenter of it all."

She said that education has played and will continue to play a key role in helping to transform Michigan's economy. "But if there was any good to come from this painful, heart-wrenching year, it was this: 2009 made clear that the way forward for Michigan is precisely the path we have been forging together ... creating jobs by diversifying our economy; educating our people to fill and create those jobs; and helping people when they need it most," Granholm said.

Granholm said her budget would restore the Michigan Promise Scholarship, a merit-based scholarship program that provides eligible high school graduates with up to \$4,000 towards postsecondary education at any approved Michigan institution. The scholarship program was made unavailable during the 2009–10 school year, leaving 100,000 families wondering how they would fund their students' tuition bills, Granholm said.

According to a February 12 [Detroit Free Press article](#), Granholm's 2010–11 proposed budget plan would revive the program with a twist—new college graduates would receive a \$4,000 refundable tax credit on the condition that they find employment in Michigan for at least a year. The plan was received with mixed reactions.

Granholm also said she would oppose any additional education cuts. "Sure, the choices we face in the budget are tough, but is there a single family in Michigan that would choose to make ends meet in hard times by first sacrificing the needs of the children?," she asked.

NEBRASKA: Heineman Lays Out Vision for Nebraska's Virtual High Schools

During his [state of state address](#) last month, **Governor Dave Heineman (R)** described a vision for Nebraska high schools that includes reforming school calendars and providing greater access to virtual classes and other online learning opportunities.

"Imagine how a Nebraska virtual high school could expand learning beyond the traditional school day and school year for both students and teachers," said Heineman. "For rural and urban school districts, it will provide access to a wider range of rigorous academic subjects, such as foreign languages and advanced math and science classes. For school districts with parents without internet access at home, schools could keep buildings open later in the evening for students to access these academic programs online."

Heineman emphasized the need for a common set of college- and career-ready standards and discussed the Nebraska P-16 Initiative, a coalition of twenty-eight Nebraskan organizations in government, education, and business that was developed to strengthen the state's education priorities. As part of that effort, minutes before the speech, the governor approved a new regulation that would update Nebraska's graduation requirements for the first time since 1984. The Nebraska State Board of Education also recently adopted a core curriculum of four years of English and three years of math, science, and social studies to be implemented in the 2014-15 school year.

NEVADA: Gibbons Tries to Reign in \$880 Million in Budget Shortfalls

Facing an \$880 million revenue shortfall, **Governor Jim Gibbons (R)** took a stern tone during his [state of the state address](#) on February 8. He vowed to limit government to its core functions, reduce state spending, and to avoid raising taxes.

Gibbons talked at length about education, calling it a core function of Nevada state government. He introduced the Nevada Education Gift Certificate, an opportunity for anyone to contribute directly to teacher salaries, and said he would donate 6 percent of his own salary to the cause. He cited a Nevada Department of Education study that found 142 of the 613 public schools in Nevada qualified as the "worst" in the nation and called for an end to throwing money away by giving it to education systems and initiatives that were no longer rightly serving students. He mentioned his Gibbons Education Reform plan that was unveiled in January and stressed the need for increased local and parental control over governing school systems.

"Bureaucrats and politicians in Washington, DC and Carson City, whose ideas of education reform start and end with writing a blank check, have no business dictating how your child is educated," said Gibbons. "We need to empower local school boards and parents to make decisions which are right for their children so they can decide how their kids are educated. Nevada taxpayers spend billions of dollars on education. It's time to let local school boards, teachers, and parents have a voice in how that money is spent."

Gibbons said state employees, teachers, and legislators would have to learn how to do more with less. He advised that programs must be judged on their results rather than on their intentions, and was adamant about eliminating programs that were no longer serving their purpose. During his address, the governor said across-the-board salary reductions for state workers might be necessary, though it was a last resort.

According to a February 18 article in [Business Week](#), Gibbon's recent recommendations for salary cuts could put schools at risk of losing thousands of teachers and dealing with oversized classes in high schools. The governor said that because public education makes up 52 percent of general fund spending, it cannot be shielded from the cuts.

OKLAHOMA: Henry Dips into Rainy Day Fund to Make Up for Budget Deficits

Given the state's \$1.3 billion budget shortfall, **Governor Brad Henry (D)** expressed his appreciation for the Oklahoma's Rainy Day Fund during his [state of the state address](#) on February 1.

“We beat back annual efforts to raid the fund and, today, for the first time in history, the Rainy Day Fund is full, preserved for its intended purpose: a rainy day,” said Henry. “And ladies and gentlemen, it is raining. This budget crisis is precisely the kind of emergency that citizens envisioned twenty-five years ago when they voted to create the Rainy Day Fund. Now is the time to use our reserve dollars to preserve crucial services.”

The governor made education a key focus during his speech and expressed pride in the state’s progress in improving standards and accountability, teacher quality, and college attendance rates. He commended the state superintendent for developing and submitting Oklahoma’s Race to the Top application and expressed hope for winning federal funds that would allow further reforms such as linking teacher pay to student performance and implementing comprehensive student data systems. Despite the tight budget year, he said Oklahoma would be able to increase teacher pay and, for the first time in the state’s history, cover the full cost of teachers’ health insurance.

UTAH: Herbert Maintains Level of Education Funding

“Utah has long been committed to funding our public schools, our colleges and universities, and our technical institutions,” said **Governor Gary R. Herbert (R)** during his [state of the state address](#) on January 26. “In fact, few states in the country spend as much of their overall budgets on education as we do. Our unique demographics—which is a way of saying we have larger families—mean we must continue to increase funding to maintain and enhance the solid education and training our students receive.”

Herbert called on Utah’s legislators to maintain the level of education funding at \$293 million for fiscal year 2011. In December 2009, he put forth an overall budget of \$11.3 billion and announced the formation of the Governor’s Educational Excellence Commission. The commission, chaired by the governor, is charged with developing new and innovative solutions to the state’s educational problems. Herbert explained that although some of the challenges in Utah’s schools could be overcome by additional funding, other problems could be fixed with common-sense solutions that he hopes the commission will provide.

The governor said a “renewed and sustained emphasis” is needed in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). He asked education and business stakeholders to build support for immersing more students in these fields because so many of today’s jobs require STEM skill sets.

Herbert also highlighted the Utah Cluster Acceleration Partnership, an effort to help strengthen the bridge from college to career. The partnership is comprised of industry leaders, researchers, state government officials, and higher education administrators and practitioners. Its goal is to enable critical industry groups to communicate their current and future workforce needs directly to educational institutions.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both 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. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.