



# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PASSES EDUCATION FUNDING BILL: Bill Would Target 40 Percent of School Improvement Grants to Secondary Schools**

On July 29, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved an appropriations bill that would provide the U.S. Department of Education with \$48.8 billion in discretionary funding for Fiscal Year 2011. That amount represents an increase of about \$2.7 billion over last year, but is \$800 million less than the amount President Obama requested in his budget.

Included in the Senate Appropriation Committee's version of the Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill was \$625 million for the School Improvement Grants program, which targets the nation's lowest-performing schools. The committee included a provision directing 40 percent of these funds be used to turn around the five thousand lowest-performing secondary schools, including the nation's "dropout factories," where 60 percent or fewer high school freshmen progress to senior year on time.

In a [statement](#), **Bob Wise** called the action a "critical first step" in the battle against the nation's distressingly high dropout rate. "The major funding stream for assisting the lowest-performing K-12 schools is the School Improvement Grants program or SIG," Wise said. "As presently configured, SIG is not 'SIGNificant' enough for the nation's secondary schools, for example, SIG funds are unlikely to reach even half of the nation's two thousand dropout factories."

The bill would provide \$14.94 billion for the Title I program, an increase of \$500 million over last year. The Striving Readers program would receive \$250 million, an increase of \$50 million, while Statewide Data Systems would receive \$65 million, an increase of about \$7 million. ([Click here](#) for a complete list of programs and their funding levels).

The bill will next go to the Senate floor, although a timetable for its consideration has not been set. On the House side, the Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee passed its version of the bill on July 15, but it has yet to be taken up by the full House Appropriations Committee.



## **CALL FOR ACTION: Strengthening Teacher Human Capital System Is Key to Graduating All Students Prepared for College and Careers, Says Alliance Brief**

This is a critical time for expanding the current discussion on teacher evaluation systems beyond simply focusing on identifying "good" and "bad" teachers for purposes of reward or dismissal, according to *Call for Action: Transforming Teaching and Learning to Prepare High School Students for College and Careers*, a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education.

The brief argues that the nation must also make sustained investments to build the teacher profession and focus more intently on redesigning schools to support teachers and student learning.

“To date, a great deal of policy debate on teacher effectiveness has centered on the use of student test scores for determining whether teachers receive merit pay or are fired,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “However, these strategies alone will not help to ensure that all students have access to a great teacher.”

*Call for Action*, which was made possible with the support of MetLife Foundation, highlights the unevenness in teaching quality and effectiveness that leads to vast disparities in student learning and outcomes across all levels—especially among low-income students and students of color who are traditionally underserved by the American public education system. The problem is exacerbated at the secondary level, where large numbers of out-of-field teachers, limited support for professional learning, and unfavorable working conditions are combined with large, factory-model schools to create even more challenging learning environments for students.

The brief argues that students will be adequately prepared for college and careers only if they have teachers who (1) have the knowledge and skills to make sure courses are truly challenging and (2) have the ability to elicit levels of student engagement and performance that are in line with postsecondary expectations.

Unlike higher-performing nations, however, the United States has not sustained focused investments in a stable, well-prepared teaching force. As the brief points out, federal and state attention to investing in educators has waned since the 1980s.

Demographic trends—such as the influx of the millennial generation and the departure of the baby boom generation—make the need to act even more urgent. One third of young teachers leave schools within the first few years while half are gone within five years. At the same time, “baby boomer” teachers are leaving schools with high levels of education and decades of teaching experience. In twenty states, more than half of current teachers are over the age of fifty. ([Click here to see what percentage of your state’s teachers are age fifty and older](#)).

While some schools and districts have launched innovative programs, most remain at the margins of a system that is still not designed to ensure high levels of educational attainment for all young people. Moreover, research shows that teaching has been constrained by the design of state standards and tests that reinforce twentieth-century schooling, where the teacher merely serves as a transmitter of a fixed body of knowledge and information. Teaching 2.0, in contrast, must focus on what is learned rather than on what is taught, and it must draw upon advances over the last several decades in cognitive science, technology, and assessment.

The challenge for secondary school teachers is especially difficult, notes the Alliance brief. For example, many middle and high school teachers receive meager training and support to help students develop high-level literacy skills. These teachers are also ill equipped in using regular classroom assessments that measure student progress and can inform the teacher’s instruction on how better to help widely diverse students reach high achievement levels. Teachers also fail to

receive training needed to work successfully with students from diverse populations, such as English language learners and students with disabilities.

*Call to Action* notes that the pending reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind, offers an opportunity to address the widespread inconsistencies between what students are expected to achieve and the knowledge and competencies teachers must possess to ensure their success. The brief offers several recommendations on how the federal government can support educator development:

- Support the state-led adoption and thoughtful implementation of common standards and aligned assessments toward advancing college and career readiness.
- Encourage those states working with practitioners to create standards of practice that define quality teaching based on what teachers need to know and be able to do to elicit targeted student performances embodied in common standards and assessments.
- Support the development of robust teacher performance assessments that incorporate observational measures of teaching for the purpose of evaluating, developing, and recognizing teacher effectiveness and informing professional preparation and development.
- Direct states and districts to develop coherent, performance-based human capital systems based on core practices that address career-long professional growth and advancement.
- Build and use longitudinal data systems to track teacher and student growth data, and link teacher and student performance with programs responsible for preparing and providing professional development.

The complete brief is available at

<http://www.all4ed.org/files/TransformingTeachingAndLearning.pdf>.

### **New Model Core Teaching Standards Available for Public Comment Until October 15**

On July 17, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released new model core teaching standards for public comment. Unlike the original teacher standards, which focused on the assessment and support of *beginning* teachers, the new core teaching standards are standards of professional practice for *all* teachers.

“In order to deliver on our promise to provide a first-rate education to every child, we must continue building a coherent approach to preparing, licensing, and supporting highly effective teachers,” said **Gene Wilhoit, executive director of CCSSO**. “I hope that members of the professional education community will take the time to critically review these draft standards and provide the input so they truly reflect what teachers should know and so policymakers will know what needs to change in order for teachers to be supported in their quest to reach the new vision laid out in the standards.”

According to CCSSO, these model core teaching standards represent a new vision of teaching that imagines increased focus on twenty-first-century knowledge and skills, personalized learning, a collaborative professional culture, improved assessment literacy, and new roles for teachers and administrators. The new standards are not broken down by content area, grade level, or grade span.

The draft core teaching standards are open for public comment until October 15, 2010. To download the new standards and submit comments, go to <http://www.ccsso.org/intasc>.



## **THE LINKED LEARNING APPROACH: A California-Based Reform Model Provides Direction for Transforming Teacher Preparation**

The traditional training options available to high school teachers need to be redesigned to better align teacher education with current high school reform efforts, according to a new brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education. *The Linked Learning Approach: Building the Capacity of Teachers to Prepare Students for College and Careers* argues that teacher preparation programs based on the Linked Learning approach offer a promising model for other school districts, states, and regions to create and sustain college- and career-focused learning environments.

This brief follows *Preparing Students for College and Career: Linked Learning in California*—the Alliance’s first Linked Learning brief released in March 2010—which explains the basics of a Linked Learning program, highlights promising models, and outlines the challenges and benefits of implementing the approach. Both briefs were made possible with the generous support of the James Irvine Foundation.

Launched in California, Linked Learning connects rigorous content material with real-world experience in a wide range of fields, such as engineering or arts and media, with the goal of preparing students for postsecondary education, work, and life. In both curriculum and structure, Linked Learning schools vary from traditional high schools and therefore demand a different type of teacher preparation that blends academic- and career-focused instruction.

According to *The Linked Learning Approach*, teacher-training programs with a Linked Learning focus build on traditional programs and are centered on four basic principles:

- Creating an integrated curriculum that establishes a clear connection between college prep courses and career-technical environments.
- Encouraging teachers to open their practice and collaborate with their peers.
- Developing and implementing project-based lesson plans and pacing those projects in a way that engages each student in the classroom.
- Establishing work-based learning opportunities such as internships or job shadowing.

“Just as doctors must tie the latest medical developments within their specialty into their everyday practice, teachers brought into a Linked Learning classroom are expected to integrate industry updates within their discipline into their everyday curriculum,” said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia. “In turn, this prepares students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed after graduation. It also provides an understanding of how their education will be applied in the workforce.”

*The Linked Learning Approach* concludes that meaningful support for teachers and leaders is crucial to school and student success in Linked Learning environments. Specifically, teachers require professional development opportunities to create curriculum that incorporates the role of academic content in business, industry, and community organizations. Another area where staff may need support is in developing partnerships with local businesses to offer students work-based learning opportunities. In Linked Learning schools, administrators also need encouragement and assistance to take on additional responsibilities outside the traditional school setting, such as ensuring the necessary physical infrastructures are in place, redesigning the

school day, securing funds, and purchasing relevant technology.

The brief outlines four ways that federal policy can support and promote innovative high school reform models like the Linked Learning approach in California and around the nation:

- Invest in aligning teacher education with high school reform efforts.
- Encourage adoption of school-level strategies that promote a supportive environment for college and career instruction.
- Invest in college- and career-focused education for district and school administrators.
- Remove barriers and create incentives that promote new and innovative partnerships for supporting schools.

Download *The Linked Learning Approach: Building the Capacity of Teachers to Prepare Students for College and Careers* at [www.all4ed.org/files/LinkedLearningBuildingCapacity.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/LinkedLearningBuildingCapacity.pdf).

To read the Alliance's first Linked Learning brief, *Preparing Students for College and Career: Linked Learning in California*, visit [www.all4ed.org/files/LinkedLearning.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/LinkedLearning.pdf).

### **Bush and Wise Convene Digital Learning Council to Develop Principles and Policies for Integrating Innovations in Technology into Public Education**

On August 18, **Jeb Bush, governor of Florida from 1999–2007**, and Bob Wise, governor of West Virginia from 2001–2005, launched the Digital Learning Council to identify policies that will integrate current and future technological innovations into public education. The Digital Learning Council unites a diverse group of more than fifty leaders from education, government, philanthropy, business, technology, and think tanks to develop the roadmap of reform for local, state and federal lawmakers, and policymakers.

“Technology has the power to customize education for every student in America,” said Bush, cochair of the Digital Learning Council. “Providing a customized, personalized education for students was a dream just a decade ago. Technology can turn that dream into reality today. The Digital Learning Council will develop the roadmap to achieve that ultimate goal.”

Technological innovations have already changed the way the nation works, shops and entertains itself. The Digital Learning Council will lead this national initiative to develop and transform education by moving digital learning to the forefront of education and away from the niche role it plays today. Today, more than 3.5 million students take courses online—including 1.5 million who are educated at home—but that barely scratches the surface of what is possible through technology.

“The members of the Digital Learning Council share a sense of extreme urgency about the need to bring digital learning to every school, every classroom, and every child,” said Wise, cochair of the Digital Learning Council. “We must not squander the opportunity to promote digital innovation to reform our nation’s schools and ensure that all students are prepared to confront the challenges in our economy and society with the tools and skills that digital technology offers.”

There is a wide range of areas within digital learning that the Council will cover, including online and virtual schools, personalized learning, blended learning, digital content, online and mobile social networks, and classroom technology, among other topics. It will report its ongoing discussions online and welcomes input and dialog. The final recommendations of the Digital Learning Council will be released in late November and will be the focus of a nationwide campaign to urge adoption of the policy principles by states, track states’ progress, and encourage best practices.

Learn more about the Digital Learning Council and see a list of its members and special liaisons at [http://www.all4ed.org/press\\_room/press\\_releases/08182010](http://www.all4ed.org/press_room/press_releases/08182010).

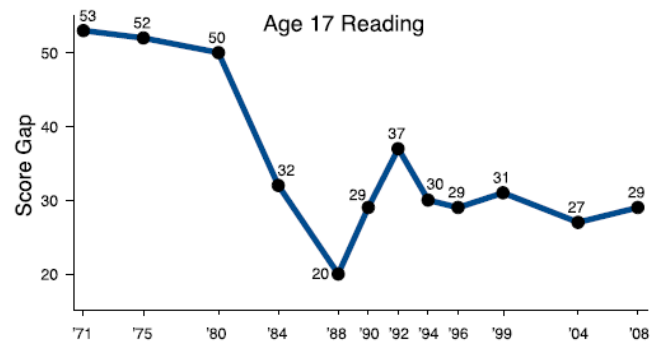


## **THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: New Report Questions Why Progress Has Stalled in Closing the Achievement Gap**

A new report from Educational Testing Service (ETS) takes a historical look at efforts to narrow the educational attainment and achievement gaps between black and white students and finds that after years of developments, the progress has stalled. *The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped* questions why the last two decades have resulted in a standstill when so much national attention has been focused on the problem.

By analyzing student test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the report finds that most of the progress in closing the achievement gap in math and reading occurred in the 1970s and 80s. For some age groups, the achievement gaps between white and black students were cut by as much as half or more. For example, in NAEP reading scores, a fifty-three-point achievement gap existed between white and black seventeen-year-olds in 1971, but by 1988 that gap had been reduced to twenty points.

**Trend in the White–Black NAEP Reading Score Gap**



A number of research efforts have been undertaken to understand this period of large gap reductions. These efforts provide several explanations such as family and demographic changes; federal investments in Head Start, Title I, and Child Nutrition Programs; increases in the proportion of students taking more rigorous courses; desegregation; reduction in class sizes; and the widespread use of minimum competency testing, which is aimed at determining whether students have acquired “basic skills,” and then pushes schools to improve these skills. However, according to the study, no cause has been established that is conclusive. The authors express confidence in research that finds up to one third of the narrowing of the gap could be explained by a set of factors including parent education and income, characteristics of the parent(s), and race or ethnicity.

*The Black-White Achievement Gap* finds that after the achievement gap narrowed during the 1970s and 80s, it remained generally stable for about a decade in both reading in math. Then from 1999 through 2004, the gap started to narrow again but not for long, and between 2004 and 2008 there were no statistically significant changes in the gap. Currently, comprehensive research does not exist to explain these periods of small and irregular changes or no changes in the gap.

To understand the changes that have occurred in the achievement gap over the last forty years, the report authors take a more expansive view and look to other forms of data beyond test scores. One body of research finds that there was a decline in the attainment gap in each decade from 1940 to 1990 on both a high school and college graduation level. However, the report indicates that the progress stalled for those born after 1965 which, the authors note, is ironic given the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.



The report states that a number of developments could play a part in blocking continued progress, such as inadequate early childhood care, the increase of single-parent families, black males' struggles to find steady employment and earnings, and stalled mobility out of seriously disadvantaged communities.

“Approaches to restart progress will require addressing this problem on multiple levels,” said **Richard J. Coley, director of the ETS Policy Information Center and coauthor of the report.** “Entire neighborhoods may have to be uplifted in terms of their economic capital, school quality, safety, and health structures.”

Although the authors do not offer any final recommendations or answers to why progress in narrowing the achievement gap has halted, they challenge the research and policy communities to learn more on this issue. To read the complete report, visit <http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICBWGAP.pdf>

### **YES WE CAN: A Present Day Snapshot of the Persisting Achievement Gap**

In the majority of U.S. states, districts, communities, and schools, conditions do not exist for black males to systemically succeed in education, according to a new report released by the Schott Foundation for Public Education. *Yes We Can: The 2010 Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* finds that nationally in School Year (SY) 2007–08 school year, only 47 percent of black males graduated from high school compared to 78 percent of white males which created a 31 point national achievement gap.

The report stresses that black males do not perform poorly in all parts of the country and highlights the states and school districts that have succeeded in closing the achievement gap as proof that all children can learn given equitable opportunities. The top-performing states for black males include Maine, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Idaho while the lowest performing states include Georgia, Alabama, Indiana, Washington, DC, and Ohio. On the district level, New Jersey's Newark district tops the list with a graduation rate of 75 percent for black males in SY 2007–08. On the other end of the spectrum, the lowest-performing school district was Jefferson Parish in Louisiana with a black male graduation rate of 28 percent.

*Yes We Can* provides several conditions for success in closing the achievement gap including

- equitable resources to support students to master rigorous, content standards-based education;
- universal, well-planned and high quality preschool education for all three- and four-year-olds;
- programs to address student and school needs attributable to high poverty such as intensive early literature or after school and summer programming;
- new and rehabilitated facilities to adequately house all programs, relieve overcrowding, and eliminate health and safety violations; and
- state accountability to ensure progress in improving student achievement.

To read the complete report and view more state- and district-level breakdowns of the black male graduation rate, go to <http://www.blackboysreport.org/>.

***Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress*** is a 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. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy organization that works to improve national and federal policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century. For more information about the Alliance, visit <http://www.all4ed.org>.