



Straight A's

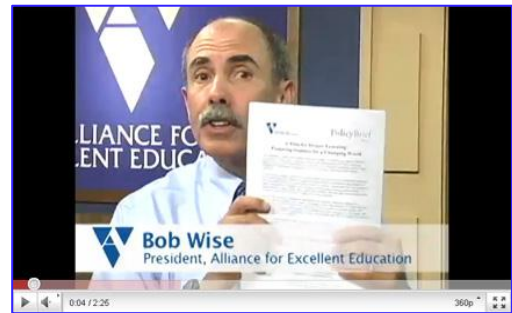
Public Education Policy And Progress



A TIME FOR DEEPER LEARNING: New Alliance Brief Says Deeper Learning Is Imperative for All Students

Policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels should support the concepts of “deeper learning” to help all students meet higher expectations and be prepared for college and a career, according to a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education. The brief, “A Time for Deeper Learning: Preparing Students for a Changing World,” argues that deeper learning provides students with the deep content knowledge students need to succeed after high school and the critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills that today’s jobs demand.

“The term ‘deeper learning’ may be new, but its basic concepts are not,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Deeper learning is what highly effective educators have always provided: the delivery of rich core content to students in innovative ways that allow them to learn and then apply what they have learned.” (To hear more from Gov. Wise on the Alliance’s deeper learning brief, click on the image to the right.)



According to the brief, today’s increasingly complex world requires that young people learn more, process more, and produce more, but the nation’s education infrastructure is not currently designed to support these increasing demands. As evidence, the brief points to results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showing that American students trail their peers from other developed countries in using their knowledge to solve problems in key subjects like reading, math, and science.

“A Time for Deeper Learning” argues that American schools tend to offer a two-tiered curriculum in which some students—primarily white and relatively affluent—have had opportunities for deeper learning, while others—primarily low-income and students of color—have focused almost exclusively on basic skills and knowledge. It finds that the nation’s prosperity in the near future will depend more than ever on students from underserved groups.

There are hundreds of schools across the country that are successfully incorporating deeper learning principles and are seeing promising educational results, the brief finds. For example, Envision Schools, which operates four urban high schools in the San Francisco Bay area, educates predominately disadvantaged students, the majority of whom are first-generation

college bound. In 2008, 95 percent of Envision graduates were admitted and have stayed in college.

Although individual schools and systems are successfully applying deeper learning and can demonstrate its effectiveness and practicality, bringing such experiences to all students is a formidable undertaking. However, as the brief notes, supportive policies such as the adoption of common core state standards that help to ensure college and career readiness, the development of next-generational assessments aligned to those standards, and recent developments in educational technology indicate that policymakers are starting to come together on the changes and investments that are needed.

The brief observes that the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind, presents a unique opportunity for federal policymakers to create opportunities for states and districts to put into place the kinds of policies and practices that a deeper learning environment requires. It outlines policy actions that support deeper learning in five different areas—standards, assessments, accountability, professional development and teaching practice, and state-level policies—and provides a picture of what deeper learning might look in the classroom.

The complete brief is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/DeeperLearning.pdf>.

More Alliance for Excellent Education Resources on Deeper Learning

On May 26, the Alliance released its brief, “A Time for Deeper Learning” at an event on Capitol Hill. At the event, panelists discussed the practice of deeper learning and the federal policy implications of preparing all students for the demands of a rapidly changing global workforce and the economy.

The event included **Barbara Chow**, program director for education, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; **Michael J. Feuer**, dean and professor, graduate school of education and human development, the George Washington University; **Robert Lenz**, cofounder and chief executive officer, Envision Schools; **Deborah Parizek**, executive director, Henry Ford Learning Institute; **Scott Palmer**, managing partner, EducationCounsel, LLC; **David M. Steiner**, Commissioner of Education, State of New York; **Tom Wachnicki**, director, New Tech School of IDEAS (Indianapolis, IN); and Alliance President Bob Wise. Access archived video from the event by clicking on the image to the right.



Additionally, the Alliance held a webinar in February 2011 that featured Barbara Chow and **Andreas Schleicher, head of indicators and analysis division at the OECD’s Directorate for Education**. Chow and Schleicher provided an overview of deeper learning and discussed how deeper learning can increase economic opportunity and civic engagement in order to ensure that American students are rigorously prepared for success in a globally competitive workforce. In particular, Schleicher discussed the Programme for International Student Assessment and how it tests the skills associated with deeper learning. [Watch archived video from February 24 webinar.](#)



SETTING NEW PRIORITIES IN EDUCATION SPENDING: House Committee Passes First Education Reform Bill, Eliminates More than Forty Federal Education Programs

On May 25, the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce passed the first in a series of education reform bills designed to revamp the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The bill, “Setting New Priorities in Education Spending Act,” which passed on a [party-line vote of twenty-three to sixteen](#), would eliminate more than forty federal education programs, including Striving Readers, Smaller Learning Communities, High School Graduation Initiative, and Enhancing Education Through Technology (Ed-Tech).

“This is an important step toward streamlining and simplifying the federal footprint in education,” said **House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN)**. “There are more than eighty programs under current elementary and secondary education law, and that’s just too complicated and too great a burden for our schools and local districts. It’s time to weed out the programs that aren’t working and focus on initiatives that lead to real success in the nation’s classrooms. I look forward to continuing this important debate on the House floor.”

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, acknowledged that not every federal program is effective and agreed that some program consolidation is warranted. However, he added that the nation “should make better use of limited federal education dollars, not simply by eliminating a host of programs, but by bringing greater coherence to federal education policy.” He said this coherence could be achieved through a “comprehensive reauthorization” of ESEA.

Wise also thanked **Representatives Bobby Scott (D-VA), Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX), and Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ)** for offering an amendment that would have restored some of the dropout prevention activities that the bill eliminated. The amendment failed on a [party-line vote of sixteen to twenty-three](#).

In defense of the amendment, [Scott noted](#) that it would specifically restore dropout prevention services that are not duplicative and authorized in other sections of ESEA. “There are dropout prevention services that are successful,” Scott said. “Those services should be expanded. There are also dropout prevention services that are unsuccessful. Those services should be cut. Dropout prevention services ensure that the nation’s high school students—and the nation itself—succeed.”

[Eight additional amendments](#) were offered, including ones focused on literacy, foreign language, and teacher and leader recruitment and development.

The bill’s sponsor, **House Education and the Workforce Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee Chairman Duncan Hunter (R-CA)**, said that “streamlining the existing patchwork of programs, which this bill accomplishes, will go a long way toward improving the quality of education for every American.”



COMMENCEMENT CHALLENGE: Obama Delivers Commencement Address at Memphis High School, Calls for NCLB Rewrite in Weekly Address

As the winner of the White House's 2011 Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge, Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee welcomed President Obama on May 16, who delivered the graduating class's commencement address.

In the school's video submission for the commencement challenge, students at Booker T. Washington noted the unique challenges they face, including a crime rate in South Memphis that is fourteenth highest in the nation; single parents leading 70 percent of their households; and a median income of \$10,734. But students in the video also noted the successes that the high school has achieved. For example, its math scores are 20 percent higher than the state's math scores; the school's graduation rate has increased from 55 percent to 82 percent; and, from 2005 to 2010, its college-going rate increased from 4 percent to 70 percent.



In his speech to the graduating class, President Obama mentioned several of the reforms the school has in place, including special academies for ninth graders to ensure that students start off on the right track; Advanced Placement classes and dual enrollment policies that allow students to earn college credit; and a new culture that prizes hard work and discipline and shows every student that they matter and that their teachers believe in them.

“Today, Booker T. Washington is a place that has proven why we can’t accept excuses when it comes to education,” Obama said. “In the United States of America, we should never accept anything less than the best that our children have to offer. Because if success can happen here at Booker T. Washington, it can happen anywhere in Memphis. And if it can happen in Memphis, it can happen anywhere in Tennessee. And if it can happen anywhere in Tennessee, it can happen all across America.”

Obama reminded students that good jobs did not always depend on a good education, but that times have changed. He told students that they were not only competing against students in Nashville and Atlanta but also against those in Beijing and Mumbai. “That’s some tough competition,” Obama said. “Those kids are hungry. They’re working hard. And you’ll need to be prepared for it. And as a country, we need all of our young people to be ready. We can’t just have some young people successful. We’ve got to have every young person contributing [by] earning those high school diplomas and then earning those college diplomas, or getting certified in a trade or profession. We can’t succeed without it.”

In his [weekly address](#) on May 21, Obama discussed the reforms he saw at Booker T. Washington High School, including a residency program that pairs new teachers with veteran educators who

serve as mentors. He also referenced the Race to the Top program, which is promoting reforms in Oregon, Michigan, and elsewhere where teachers are lengthening the school day, offering more specialized classes, and making necessary changes to improve struggling schools.

“Our challenge now is to allow all fifty states to benefit from the success of Race to the Top,” Obama said. “We need to promote reform that gets results while encouraging communities to figure out what’s best for their kids. That’s why it’s so important that Congress replace No Child Left Behind this year—so schools have that flexibility. Reform just can’t wait.”



STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS: NCEE Report Outlines American Agenda for Education Reform Based on Highest-Performing Nations

After examining the policy agendas of the most successful countries, a new report from the Nation Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) argues that the strategies driving the best-performing education systems in the world are rarely found in the United States. Additionally, the report, *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: An American Agenda for Education Reform*, finds that strategies now most popular in the United States, such as reduced class size and increased spending on education, are absent from the nations with the most successful education systems. It notes that only the effort to develop internationally benchmarked standards and high-quality assessments can be found on the policy agendas of the highest-performing nations.

“In the late 1970s, Japan was eating the lunch of some of America’s greatest corporations,” said **Marc Tucker, president and chief executive officer of NCEE and author of the report.**

“Those that survived figured out how they were doing it and did it even better. The most effective way to greatly improve student performance in the United States is to figure out how the countries with top student performance are doing it, build on their achievements, and then, by building on our unique strengths, figure out how to do it even better.”

The report notes that the United States was “among the most eager benchmarkers” in the world a century ago. It borrowed the best ideas in steelmaking, industrial chemicals, and education from the top-performing nations and rode those innovations to the most rapid growth the economy had ever seen. But after World War II, when the United States appeared to “reign supreme” in both the industrial and educational arenas, it “came to the conclusion” that it had little to learn from anyone. As the years went by, the report argues, country after country caught up and surpassed the United States “more or less across the board in precollege education.”

Using Shanghai, Japan, Finland, Singapore, and Canada as models, the report identifies two “big developments” that necessitated fundamental changes in the design of education systems. The first, which the report calls the “trajectory of global economic development,” states that successful nations have abandoned the idea that education systems can reach their goals by “sorting students, giving only some students intellectually demanding curricula, by recruiting only a few teachers who are themselves educated to high levels, and by directing funding toward the easiest to educate and denying it to those hardest to educate.”

The second development has to do with the kinds of people needed to teach children in the current stage of global economic development.

“No nation can move the vast majority of students to the levels of intellectual capacity and creativity now demanded on a national scale unless that nation is recruiting most of its teachers from the group of young people who are now typically going into the non-feminized professions,” the report reads. “Recruiting from that pool requires a nation not just to offer competitive compensation but also to offer the same status in the society that the non-feminized occupations offer, the same quality of professional training, and the same conditions of work in the workplace.”

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants acknowledges that there are “useful roles” that the federal government can play in dramatically improving the nation’s schools, but stresses that the main players must be state governments. It offers the following recommendations for states:

- Build strategies for improving student performance on the continuing study of strategies employed by top-performing countries.
- Expand the work begun on the common core state standards to the rest of the core curriculum, and create curriculum frameworks that specify topics to be taught in the core subjects, grade by grade.
- Develop a world-class teaching force by greatly raising entry standards for teacher education programs, and by moving teacher training from low-status higher education institutions to research universities.
- Move away from local control of school finance and toward state adoption of responsibility for financing schools.
- Abandon the old industrial model of school and district management and move toward modern methods of managing professionals.
- Spend education budgets differently by spending less on fancy school buildings, glossy textbooks, intramural sports, and district administration, and by spending more on teachers and the most disadvantaged students.
- Make sure all elements of the education system are coherent and aligned.

The report envisions the federal government taking on a role to “provide assistance” to states that would like to implement an agenda containing the recommendations listed above but lack the resources necessary to do so. It notes that that Obama administration has already moved in this direction through the creation of the Race to the Top program, which encourages the kind of “comprehensive and coherent planning” advocated in the report, as well as the decision to use Race to the Top funds to support the development of tests matched to the common core state standards. It also points out that President Obama has proposed several initiatives on teacher quality that are consistent with strategies other nations have adopted.

For future action, the paper recommends that reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind, include a section that would create a competition among states for funds that would be used to implement the agenda described in the report.

NCEE released the report at a May 24 event featuring Tucker; **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**; **John Merrow**, education correspondent for the PBS NewsHour; **John Wilson**,

executive director of the National Education Association; **Randi Weingarten**, president of the American Federation of Teachers; **Linda Darling-Hammond**, professor at the Stanford University School of Education; and several other representatives from K–12 and postsecondary education, education policy, and state legislature arenas. To watch video from the event, click on the image to the right.



Download the complete report at <http://bit.ly/kFzSeY>.

Condition of Education 2011: Annual Report Includes Fifty Different Education Indicators and Special Analysis of Changes in Postsecondary Education

Released on May 26 by the National Center for Education Statistics, *Condition of Education 2011* presents fifty different indicators of important developments and trends in U.S. education. The indicators focus on participation and persistence in education, student performance and other measures of achievement, the environment for learning, and resources for education. The report also includes a special section on changes in postsecondary education in the United States by institution level and control.

According to the report, public elementary and secondary enrollment in U.S. schools is expected to increase from 49.3 million to 52.7 million students, while undergraduate enrollment is expected to increase from 17.6 million students in 2009 to 19.6 million in 2020.

The report also notes that progress on national assessments in reading and math have been made among fourth- and eighth-grade students since the early 1990s, although “significant” gaps remain between white students and students of color.

With regard to college remediation, the report finds that about 36 percent of first-year undergraduate students reported taking a remedial course, while about 42 percent of students at public, two-year institutions reported taking a remedial course. The report also notes that about 54 percent of male and 60 percent of female first-time students who sought a bachelor’s degree and enrolled at a four-year institution full time in fall 2002 completed a bachelor’s degree at that institution within six years.

Young adults ages twenty-five to thirty-four who held bachelor’s degrees earned more than twice as much as young adults without a high school diploma or its equivalent, according to the report. College degree recipients also made 50 percent more than young adult high school graduates. The report also notes that young adults ages twenty-five to thirty-four with at least a bachelor’s degree had a full-time employment rate (74 percent) that was over 30 percentage points higher than that of their peers who had not completed high school (41 percent).

The complete report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>.

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. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Emily Kingsland, writer; and Kate Bradley, copyeditor.

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>.