



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



OBAMA SETS TIMELINE FOR NCLB REVAMP: President Calls on Congress to Send Him an Education Reform Bill “Before the Next School Year Begins”

During a March 14 [speech](#) at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, Virginia, President Obama outlined several fixes to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and called on Congress to send him a bill that reforms the law before the start of the next school year.



Obama repeated an estimate originally given by **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** in [testimony](#) before the House Education and the Workforce

Committee on March 9 that more than 80 percent of the nation’s schools would be labeled as failing under NCLB this year. Calling the percentage an “astonishing” number, Obama said the natural reaction is to “either be outraged that the numbers are so high, or skeptical that they’re even true.” For his part, Obama said skepticism is “somewhat justified” and added “we know that four out of five schools in this country aren’t failing. So what we’re doing to measure success and failure is out of line.”

Citing a need for more money and more reform, Obama pointed to Race to the Top as an example of the “bottom-up approach” needed in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as NCLB. Obama said NCLB’s goals—educating every child with an excellent teacher, raising standards, accountability, and a focus on achievement gaps—were the right ones. But he also cited the need to graduate students ready for college and careers and provide teachers with the pay and support they deserve.

Obama said he wants to move from simply identifying schools in need of improvement to helping them improve. “We need a better way of figuring out which schools are deeply in trouble, which schools aren’t, and how we get not only the schools that are in really bad shape on track, how do we help provide the tools to schools that want to get even better to get better,” he said.

To better understand whether students are making progress, mastering reading, math, and science, but also developing critical thinking and collaboration skills, Obama called for a new way to assess students. “That doesn’t mean testing is going to go away; there will be testing,” he said. “But the point is, is that we need to refine how we’re assessing progress so that we can have

accountability without rigidity—accountability that still encourages creativity inside the classroom, and empowers teachers and students and administrators.”

Obama told students in attendance that they will need a college degree or advanced training if they want a bright future in the new economy, and he said that improvements in the nation’s high school and college graduation rates would help students and the nation’s economy. He noted that as many as one-quarter of American students are not finishing high school while the nation as a whole has fallen to ninth from first in the proportion of young people with a college degree.

“Turning these statistics around isn’t just the right thing to do for our kids—it’s the right thing to do for our economy, because the best jobs program out there is a good education,” Obama said. “The best economic policy is one that produces more college graduates. And that’s why, for the sake of our children and our economy and America’s future, we’re going to have to do a better job educating every single one of our sons and daughters—all of them.”

Obama closed his speech by talking about the current debate on reducing the federal deficit. He acknowledged a need to “get our deficits under control,” but stressed that spending cuts could not be done recklessly or irresponsibly. “Let me make it plain,” he said. “We cannot cut education. We can’t cut the things that will make America more competitive.”

In reaction to Obama’s speech, **Representative John Kline (R-MN), chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee**, told [The Hill](#), a newspaper covering Capitol Hill, that there was a “common recognition” that the status quo is unacceptable and NCLB needs to be replaced. However, he added that he was not going to rush a rewrite of the law and do it wrong. “We need to take the time to get this right—we cannot allow an arbitrary timeline to undermine quality reforms that encourage innovation, flexibility, and parental involvement,” Kline said.



EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY: Increasing High School Graduation Rates Significantly Boost Job Creation, Home Ownership, and Car Sales, New Study Finds

Cutting the high school dropout rate in half for just one class would likely lead to billions of dollars in increased earnings, provide a boost to home and automobile sales, and create more than 50,000 new jobs nationwide, according to a ground-breaking new study released on March 22 by the Alliance for Excellent Education.

“The best economic stimulus is a high school diploma,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “From the individual student to the bank branch manager, new car salesman, or realtor, everyone wins when more students graduate from high school.”

These findings, contained in “Education and the Economy: Boosting the Nation’s Economy by Improving High School Graduation Rates,” demonstrate, for the first time, the economic benefits the nation—as well as each state—would likely see if its number of high school dropouts was cut in half. This publication, which was made possible through the generous support of State Farm[®], builds on the Alliance’s previous work examining education and the economy and provides clear evidence that in an information-age economy, education is the only currency.

“As a business leader I’m committed to a quality education for all children and to strengthening the vitality of our communities,” said **Edward B. Rust, Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of State Farm®**. “The new findings from the Alliance for Excellent Education conclusively demonstrate that graduating from high school has significant positive economic and financial benefits for the business community and not just for the individual getting the education. Assuring that all of our students graduate from high school with the skills necessary to compete in a global economy is something all businesses—small and large—should see as a priority.”

Summary of Key Findings

Nationwide, an estimated 1.3 million students dropped out from the Class of 2010 without earning a diploma. Cutting this number in half would yield 650,000 “new” high school graduates who would likely make additional contributions to the nation’s economy by

- spending **\$19 billion** more on home purchases than what they would likely spend without a diploma;
- supporting **54,000 jobs** and increasing the gross domestic product by as much as **\$9.6 billion** by the time they reach the midpoint of their careers;
- earning **\$7.6 billion** more *in an average year*, compared to their likely earnings without a high school diploma;
- spending an additional **\$5.6 billion** and investing an additional **\$2 billion** *in an average year*;
- boosting state tax revenues by **\$713 million** *in an average year*; and
- spending an additional **\$741 million** *in an average year* purchasing automobiles.

These dollar amounts represent economic returns from cutting the dropout *rate for only one high school class*. Increasing the graduation rates for future classes would create cumulative benefits that would be exponentially greater.

“Decisions on how to close budget gaps and build a strong economy must begin with ensuring better educational outcomes for the nation’s students,” said Wise. “There’s been a lot of talk about how budget deficits threaten our children’s future, but the best way to cut budget deficits is to cut dropout rates.”

According to [data from the U.S. Census Bureau](#), a high school dropout earned an average of \$21,023 in 2008, compared to \$31,283 for a high school graduate and \$58,613 for an individual with a bachelor’s degree. According to the [most recent data](#) from the U.S. Department of Labor, high school dropouts are over three times more likely to be unemployed than are college graduates.

The economic model used to generate this report was developed by the Alliance for Excellent Education in partnership with Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc.

To access the national findings as well as findings for individual states, visit the Alliance’s website at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/EconStates.

PROJECTIONS OF EDUCATION STATISTICS: Number of Hispanic and Asian Graduates Expected to Significantly Increase Over the Next Decade

Although only a slight increase is expected in the overall number of high school graduates over the next few years, much larger increases are expected for Hispanic and Asian students, according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). *Projections of Education Statistics to 2019* is the 38th report of a series begun in 1964 and examines elementary and secondary enrollment, high school graduation rates, the number of teachers, school expenditures, and enrollment in postsecondary degree-granting institutions.

Nationally, the study finds that the overall number of high school graduates increased by 27 percent between School Years (SY) 1994–95 and 2006–07. A further increase of only 1 percent is expected between SY 2006–07 and SY 2019–20. Over that same time period, the number of high school graduates is expected to increase by 60 percent for Hispanic students and 39 percent for Asian/Pacific Islander students. The number of graduates is expected to decrease by 13 percent for white students and by 2 percent for black and American Indian/Alaska Native students. NCES defines a high school graduate as an individual who has received formal recognition from school authorities by the granting of a diploma.

The report finds that public and private elementary and secondary enrollment increased 10 percent from fall 1994 to fall 2007. Looking at only secondary schools, the report finds that enrollment increased 23 percent between 1994 and 2007 and is projected to increase by less than 1 percent between 2007 and 2019. While the enrollment rate for all grades is expected to increase 6 percent by 2019, 36 percent of enrollment increases are predicted for Hispanic students, 31 percent for Asian/Pacific Islands, and 13 percent for American Indians/Alaskan Natives. Enrollment for white and black students is expected to decrease by 4 percent.

Projections of Education Statistics to 2019 finds that current expenditures per pupil increased 29 percent from SY 1994–95 to 2006–07, and is projected to increase by 14 percent, to \$11,400, by SY 2019–20. To read the full report visit: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011017>.



TEACHER AND LEADER EFFECTIVENESS: New Alliance Report Outlines International Lessons from Finland, Ontario, and Singapore

High-performing education systems around the world provide valuable lessons for the United States as policymakers and educators seek to develop systems to improve teacher and school leader effectiveness in this country, concludes a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE).

The release of the report coincided with the March 16–17 [International Summit on the Teaching Profession](#), hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and designed to engage countries around the globe in an intensive discussion about promising practices for recruiting, preparing, developing, supporting, retaining, evaluating, and compensating world-class teachers.

Teacher and Leader Effectiveness in High-Performing Education Systems, edited by **Linda Darling-Hammond**, Stanford University professor and codirector of SCOPE, and **Robert Rothman**, a senior fellow at the Alliance, examines highly effective lessons from education systems that develop and support teachers and leaders in Finland, Ontario, and Singapore. These jurisdictions were chosen because they have attained among the highest and most equitable performance in the world on international assessments and because they attribute their success to their efforts to recruit, prepare, develop, and retain highly effective educators. They are comparable in population to mid-sized U.S. states.

“Nations that take student learning seriously do not leave teacher quality to chance,” observed Darling-Hammond. “They ensure that all teachers get access to the knowledge and skills they need to be successful, and they support their improvement throughout their careers.”

The report outlines five lessons learned from these three jurisdictions’ systems:

- It takes a system.
- Get it right from the start.
- Make teaching an attractive profession.
- Invest in continuous learning.
- Proactively recruit and develop high-quality leadership.

The policies of these nations are not expected to be imported wholesale into the United States, the report notes. Rather, these policies can expand U.S. policymakers’ views of what is possible. The examples also show how these policies can be implemented in different contexts.

In addition to an overview chapter that summarizes these lessons and shows how each system carries them out, the report also includes detailed descriptions of teacher- and leader-effectiveness policies from the education systems in Finland, Ontario, and Singapore; these descriptions were written by senior policy officials in each of the jurisdictions.

In Finland, the profession of teaching holds a high social prestige and educators enjoy a high level of authority and autonomy in the classroom, including responsibility for curriculum design and student assessment. Finland has a commitment to research-based teacher education and provides certified teachers with ongoing professional development and reasonable and equitable salaries.

In Ontario, Canada, there is a shared understanding of the importance of setting clear goals for high standards of achievement to enable students of all abilities to achieve their potential. There is also an established respect for teachers as professionals; school principals and district leaders provide teachers with continuous and supportive instructional leadership.

Singapore’s education system first came to international attention in 2003 when its students ranked first in the world in both mathematics and science on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Schools in Singapore are encouraged to engage both students and teachers in experiential and cooperative learning, action research, scientific investigations, entrepreneurial activities, and discussion and debate. The education system’s success is based on well-prepared and well-centered teachers. Career development is an ongoing matter of interest in Singapore schools and career tracks are well-established to support promotions and tap teachers for a variety of leader roles.

In tandem with the report, the Alliance for Excellent Education also released an issue brief that includes a version of the report’s overview chapter. The issue brief is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/TeacherLeaderEffectivenessBrief.pdf>.

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

SAVE THE DATES: Upcoming Alliance Webinars on Homeless Students, MetLife Teacher Survey, and International Education Lessons

Over the next week, the Alliance for Excellent Education will hold three interactive webinars. For additional information on each webinar and instructions on how to RSVP, click on its hyperlink below.

[Thursday, March 24: Foreclosed Futures, Part I: The Impact of Homelessness on a Student's Education:](#)

Featuring **Phillip Lovell**, vice president of federal advocacy at the Alliance for Excellent Education, and **Barbara Duffield**, policy director at the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY), this webinar will feature the personal stories of four homeless students who will talk about what it means to be homeless, as well as the challenges they face to graduate from high school.

[Friday, March 25: The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: College and Career Readiness and the Implications for Teaching:](#)

This webinar will focus on the findings of the 2010 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* released this month in two parts. *Part 1: Clearing the Path* examines the importance of being college and career ready, what this level of preparation includes, and what it may take to get there. *Part 2: Teaching Diverse Learners* (coming March 23) looks at differences in student needs, how teachers address them, and how well students feel their needs are being met. **William R. Hite, Jr., PhD**, Prince George's County Public Schools (Maryland); **Kelly Kovacic**, The Preuss School University of California–San Diego; **Dana Markow, PhD**, Harris Interactive; **Susan Traiman**, Business Roundtable; **Dennis White**, MetLife Foundation; and **Bob Wise**, Alliance for Excellent Education will discuss the survey findings and their implications for shaping educational policies, including key elements in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the nation's primary federal law governing K–12 education.

[Monday, March 28: Teacher and Leader Effectiveness: Lessons Learned from High-Performing Education](#)

Systems: Featuring **Linda Darling-Hammond**, codirector, Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), **Bob Wise**, president, Alliance for Excellent Education, and **Robert Rothman**, senior fellow, Alliance for Excellent Education, this webinar will highlight some of the lessons learned about teacher-effectiveness policy from Finland, Ontario, and Singapore. Darling-Hammond and Rothman, coeditors of a new report, *Teacher and Leader Effectiveness in High-Performing Education Systems*, will present findings from the report and video clips of senior policy officials who have studied the three systems.



STATE OF THE STATES: Tennessee and Florida Governors Call for Reforming Teacher Policies

Tennessee: Haslam Recognizes and Encourages Great Teachers

Governor Bill Haslam (R) delivered his first [state of the state address](#) on March 14 and proposed an average 2.5 percent reduction throughout state government but a 1.6 percent salary increase for state employees. He talked at length about teaching and learning, calling on the state Board of Education to help educators spend more time in the classroom and less on paperwork.

“I want to be very clear: my goal is to treat teaching like the important and honorable position that it is,” said Haslam. “My goal is to make Tennessee a place where great educators want to teach and feel rewarded and appreciated for their efforts. Because, at the end of the day, there is nothing that makes as much difference to a child’s educational experience as the teacher standing in front of the classroom.”

The governor discussed his plan to require a five-year period before teacher tenure is granted and periodic reviews to ensure that the best teachers are in the classroom. He said tenure reform should be viewed as a recognition and reward of achievement not as a punitive action. Haslam recognized a science teacher from Chattanooga and her efforts to increase student engagement

and collaborate with other teachers. He also recommended removing caps on the number of charter schools and expanding school choice.

The governor noted that there will be a 2 percent reduction in higher education but no decrease in financial aid for low-income students. He prioritized increasing college graduation rates, noting that while 30 percent of the national adult population has a higher degree only 21 percent of adult Tennesseans do. Additionally, Haslam asked for flexibility in applying HOPE funds, the state merit-based college scholarships program, to students' summer terms in order to ensure timely graduation from technical centers, community colleges, and four-year institutions.

Florida: Scott Calls for Student Learning to Guide Education Reform

“With so many Floridians out of work, and the exhaustion of one-time federal handouts, Florida educators will face challenges in managing limited resources,” said **Governor Rick Scott (R)** during his first [state of the state address](#) on March 8. “But our commitment to positive change must not waiver.”

Reminding his constituents that “we all improve through competition,” the governor suggested that every school in the state should be focused on continual improvement in order to outperform every other school attracting students. He called for increasing scholarship opportunities, expanding the number of charter schools, and directing more education money to the classroom instead of to administrative costs or capital expenditures. On accountability, the governor said students must be tested and educators must be evaluated using fair and thoughtful measurements that are linked to clear rewards and consequences.

Scott expressed his belief that student learning should drive all education reform efforts and called for recruiting, training, supporting, and promoting great teachers, principals, and superintendents. He said educators should be treated like other working professionals and rewarded based on their performance rather than on the length of their professional life. Scott also called for paying superior educators more and ending the practice of guaranteeing teachers a job for life without taking into account their effectiveness.

The [Associated Press](#) recently reported that Scott is planning to sign legislation that would take away Florida public school teachers' job security, but at the same time, give them the opportunity to earn more if their students do well on standardized tests. The bill has been received with mixed reaction. **Andy Ford, president of the state teacher union**, was quoted in the story as saying, “We’ve looked closely at plenty of scientifically sound, peer-reviewed research out there that shows this is the wrong approach to take to implement performance pay and to revamp evaluations.”

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>.