



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



FY 2011 SPENDING DISCUSSIONS CONTINUE: Pressure Mounts as April 8 Deadline Approaches and Possibility of Government Shutdown Increases

The possibility of a government shutdown is becoming more likely after negotiations between House Republicans and Senate Democrats appeared to break down on a spending bill that would fund the government through the rest of Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, which ends on September 30.

Previously, House Republicans and Senate Democrats were able to agree on two separate short-term spending bills, or continuing resolutions (CR), that cut a total of \$10 billion while keeping the government running. An agreement on a permanent solution, however, has been much more difficult to reach. With the most recent CR set to expire on April 8, there is little time for the parties to negotiate a compromise. Over the weekend, it was believed that congressional staff from both parties were working on a long-term solution that would make \$33 billion in additional cuts, but it is now unclear whether Republicans are on board with that figure.

The \$33 billion figure is the approximate midpoint between Senate Democrats' desire to keep spending at FY 2010 levels and the \$61.5 billion in cuts that House Republicans included in the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, or H.R. 1, which passed the House in February. As it has been for the last few months, a compromise has been difficult to reach because Senate Democrats have balked at the level of cuts contained in H.R. 1 as well as the policy provisions it includes that would block environmental regulations and the implementation of the health care overhaul that was signed into law last year.

During his [speech](#) in Maryland on Friday, President Obama seemed to think an agreement was close. "After a few weeks of negotiations between Democrats, Republicans, and my team at the White House, it appears that we're getting close to an agreement between the leaders of both parties on how much spending we should cut," Obama said.

However, after meeting on Monday, April 4 with members from his caucus, **House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH)** issued a [statement](#) saying there is "no agreement on a number until everything—including the important policy provisions from H.R. 1—is resolved." Boehner added that the \$33 billion figure is "not enough" and "unacceptable."

In an effort to extend the deadline, House Republicans introduced another short-term CR that would fund the U.S. Department of Defense for the rest of the fiscal year, but would only fund the rest of the government until April 15. At the same time, the bill would make an additional \$12 billion in cuts, including a \$100 million cut to the Enhancing Education Through Technology program and a rescission of \$186 million in unobligated FY 2010 funds from the

Striving Readers program. Several other education programs would be cut under the measure. More details are available from [Education Week's Politics K-12 blog](#).

Some Democrats believe that Boehner could be taking a hard line in an effort to hold together his caucus, which includes eighty-seven freshman Republicans who were elected on promises to dramatically cut federal spending. They see Boehner's rejection of the \$33 billion figure and the introduction of the latest short-term CR as a negotiating ploy designed to appeal to the Tea Party.

"This is an historic level of spending cuts, it is the halfway mark between the two sides, and the speaker has already agreed to this number privately," [said Senator Charles Schumer \(D-NY\)](#). "At this point, we are so far down the road towards an agreement, and so little time remains before Friday's deadline, that it would be a dramatic about-face for the speaker to suddenly let things devolve into a shutdown, as many in the Tea Party are urging," Schumer said.

Pressure for Additional Spending Cuts Expected in FY 2012

On Tuesday, April 5, **House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI)** unveiled a [budget proposal for FY 2012](#) that would cut approximately \$6 trillion in spending over the next ten years and reduce the top income tax rate for individuals and corporations from 35 percent to 25 percent.

Ryan's budget plan would cut overall domestic discretionary spending to below fiscal 2008 levels and freeze it there for five years. Senate Democrats are unlikely to accept such large spending cuts to domestic programs, but Ryan's proposal will certainly trigger a vigorous debate on spending and tax priorities going forward.

U.S. Department of Education to Hold Webinar Detailing Grant Process for Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program

On Friday, April 8, from 1:00 – 2:00 pm (ET), the U.S. Department of Education will conduct a webinar to provide information about the release of the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) application for new grants. The webinar will provide applicants and other interested participants with a general overview of the SRCL program's purposes and priorities, selection criteria, and the application process. The webinar will include time for participants to ask questions.

Register for the webinar at <http://bit.ly/dO72LX>. The call-in number for the webinar is 877-951-6686 and the participant code is 5828011.



CHECK YOUR LOCAL LISTINGS: Throughout April, Alliance to Release Data Demonstrating How Improvements in High School Graduation Rates Can Boost Local Economies

To better understand the various economic benefits that a particular community could expect if it were to reduce its number of high school dropouts, the Alliance for Excellent Education, with generous support from State Farm®, analyzed the local economies of more than 220 U.S. cities and their surrounding areas. Using a sophisticated economic model developed by Economic Modeling Specialists Inc., an Idaho-based economics firm specializing in socioeconomic impact tools, the Alliance calculated economic projections tailored to these areas.

Throughout the month of April, the Alliance for Excellent Education will release its findings for these 220+ metro areas. These findings are in addition to [findings for the nation and each state](#) that the Alliance released last month. To learn more about the study and its implications for the nation as a whole, click on the short video to the right.



The new customized data provides an estimate of how many students dropped out from the Class of 2010 in featured metro areas and shows how cutting this number in half could create jobs, boost home and automobile sales, increase individuals' earnings, raise spending and investment levels, support overall economic growth, increase local tax revenues; and grow human capital.

A complete list of the metro areas included in the study, as well as their scheduled date of release is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/econ>.

 **BUILDING A GRAD NATION: New Report Finds a 6.4 Percent Decrease in the Number of “Dropout Factories”**

Between 2008 and 2009, the number of high schools graduating less than 60 percent of their students decreased by 112 schools, or 6.4 percent, according to updated data released on March 22. These high schools, which are sometimes referred to as “dropout factories,” totaled 1,634 in 2009, down from a high of 2,007 in 2002.

“Our data and case studies show that improvement is continuing and even accelerating in some areas,” said **Robert Balfanz, coauthor of the updated report and codirector of the Johns Hopkins University’s Everyone Graduates Center**. “This means that real progress is possible when school districts and community partners confront this crisis strategically and commit themselves to solving it.”

When breaking down data by regions and types of schools, the report reveals uneven progress. It finds that some states made significant improvements while others moved in the wrong direction.

According to the report, eighteen states saw a decline of three or more dropout factories between 2008 and 2009. California, Illinois, and South Carolina each saw the number of dropout factories in their states decline by twenty schools or more. On the other end of the spectrum, nine states experienced increases of three or more dropout factories, including Georgia and New York, each of which had ten new dropout factories between 2008 and 2009. Twenty-three states essentially stayed the same and saw no real change in their number of dropout factories.

As shown in the chart to the right, the western part of the United States saw the greatest decrease in the number of dropout factories (-12.5 percent). In the Northeast, the dropout factories only declined by 2.8 percent.

Change by Region				
	Midwest	Northeast	Southeast	West
Class of 2008	269	252	912	313
Class of 2009	247	245	868	274
Change in Number of Schools	-22	-7	-44	-39
Percent Change	-8.2%	-2.8%	-4.8%	-12.5%

When broken down by locale, rural schools experienced the largest decrease in dropout factories (-15.5 percent), compared to a decrease of 7.5 percent for towns, a 4.7 decrease for suburbs, and a 3.4 percent decrease for cities from 2008 to 2009.

“While it is important not to overstate the significance of gains in a single year, it is noteworthy that urban and rural schools that had proven to be the most challenging to reform are showing, at least in some locales, signs of forward movement and are possibly pointing to progress for the future,” the report notes.

In addition to the updated data, the report includes four successful case studies in Baltimore, Maryland; Canton, Ohio; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Hillsborough County, Florida. The case studies provide a closer look into the work, programs, and resources that these communities are deploying and the success they are seeing as a result. The report notes that all four communities share the themes of strong leadership with clear graduation rate goals and a commitment to raising standards, as well as heavy reliance on data to inform decisionmaking.

This new data is part of an update to the November 2010 report, *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic*, authored by Civic Enterprises and John’s Hopkins University’s Everyone Graduates Center. The update was released on March 22 at the *Building a Grad Nation Summit*, which was convened by America’s Promise Alliance, the Alliance for Excellent Education, Civic Enterprises, and the Everyone Graduates Center. At the summit, the complete findings from the report were discussed by Balfanz and **John Bridgeland, another coauthor of the report and chief executive officer of Civic Enterprises.** ([Watch video from the event](#)).

The complete report is available at <http://bit.ly/e0giuk>.



METLIFE SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN TEACHER: Released in Two Parts, Annual Survey of Teachers, Students, Parents, and Business Executives Focuses on College and Career Readiness, Needs of Diverse Learners

Released in two parts last month, the 2011 [MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Preparing Students for College and Careers](#) offers perspectives on the college- and career-readiness goal from middle and high school teachers, students and parents, and business executives from Fortune 1000 companies as a voice of employers. The survey is the twenty-seventh in an annual series commissioned by MetLife and conducted by Harris Interactive.

“We all have a role to play in ensuring that students gain the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in their education, careers, and personal lives,” said **C. Robert Henrikson, chairman, president, and chief executive officer of MetLife.** “MetLife is committed to sharing the views of teachers and others to help launch an important discussion about priorities for education in the twenty-first century.”

Part 1 of the survey, [Clearing the Path](#), was released on March 9 and examines the importance of being college and career ready, what this level of preparation includes, and what it may take to get there. It finds broad agreement that graduating each and every student from high school ready

for college, with 93 percent of secondary school parents, 85 percent of secondary school teachers, and 80 percent of executives holding this view.

The study also finds that more students expect to go to college today than in the past. In 1988, only 57 percent of middle and high school students said it was “very likely” that they would go to college; by 1997, this level had increased to 67 percent. Today, 75 percent say it is very likely they will go to college. Unfortunately, teachers’ confidence that their students will graduate from college is not as high. On average, teachers predict that 63 percent of their students will finish high school ready for college without the need for remedial course work, but only 51 percent believe that their students will earn a postsecondary degree.

The survey also examines attitudes toward some common education reform proposals, including measuring teacher effectiveness, increasing the ability of schools to remove poor-performing teachers, the redesign of the school day and calendar, the expansion of public school choice, and greater assistance for diverse learners. It finds agreement among parents, teachers, and executives that these policy proposals should be priorities, but wide disagreement on which proposals should take precedence. For example, 75 percent of parents and 83 percent of executives say “giving schools more ability to remove teachers who are not serving students well” should be one of the highest priorities in education. Meanwhile, only 39 percent of teachers believe this reform measure should be one of the highest priorities, compared to 41 percent who say schools should be given more ability to remove teachers who are not serving students well, but believe this strategy should be a lower priority.

Part 2 of the survey, [*Teaching Diverse Learners*](#), was released on March 23 and looks at student differences, how teachers address them, and how well students feel their needs are being met. It finds agreement among teachers (91 percent), business executives (89 percent), and parents (84 percent) that strengthening resources to help diverse learners meet college- and career-readiness standards should be a priority in education. However, the level of priority that these groups would place on this effort varies dramatically; 59 percent of teachers and 57 percent of parents say it “must be done as one of the highest priorities in education,” compared to only 31 percent of executives.

When asked which changes would help them better meet the learning needs of individual students given limited resources, teachers said opportunities for collaborative teaching (65 percent), access to online and technology resources (64 percent), better tools for understanding students’ learning strengths and needs (63 percent), and instructional strategies for teaching English language learners (62 percent) would have a major impact on their ability to address different learning needs of individual students.

The survey also asked students to grade their teachers on how well they teach individual students based on their needs and abilities. Overall, it finds that students assigned teachers a grade of B⁻, but students who have considered dropping out of school are four times as likely as other students to give their teachers a grade of D or F (45 percent vs. 11 percent). When asked to rate the overall quality of the education they receive, only 26 percent of students rated it as “excellent” while 57 percent said it was “good.”

Both parts of the MetLife survey were featured in a March 25 webinar hosted by the Alliance for Excellent Education. Webinar participants included **William R. Hite, Jr., superintendent of Prince George’s County Public Schools (Maryland); Kelly Kovacic, California’s 2010 Teacher of the Year who teachers Advanced Placement U.S. history, Advanced Placement U.S. Government, and a seventh-grade advisory class at The Preuss School, University of California–San Diego; Dana Markow, vice president of youth and education research at Harris Interactive; Susan Traiman, director of public policy at the Business Roundtable; Dennis White, chief executive officer and president of MetLife Foundation, and Alliance President Bob Wise.**



During the webinar, participants discussed 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. The webinar also included a question and answer period to address questions submitted by viewers across the nation.

Video for the webinar and links to both parts of the MetLife survey is available at <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-mar-25>.



UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM: Early College High Schools Show Potential for Increasing Minority Student College Participation

Early college high schools have potential for increasing college participation among student groups that are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, according to a new report from Jobs for the Future (JFF). The study finds that even though these schools largely serve low-income and minority students, 73 percent of the graduates enroll in college immediately after graduation compared to 69 percent of all high school students.¹

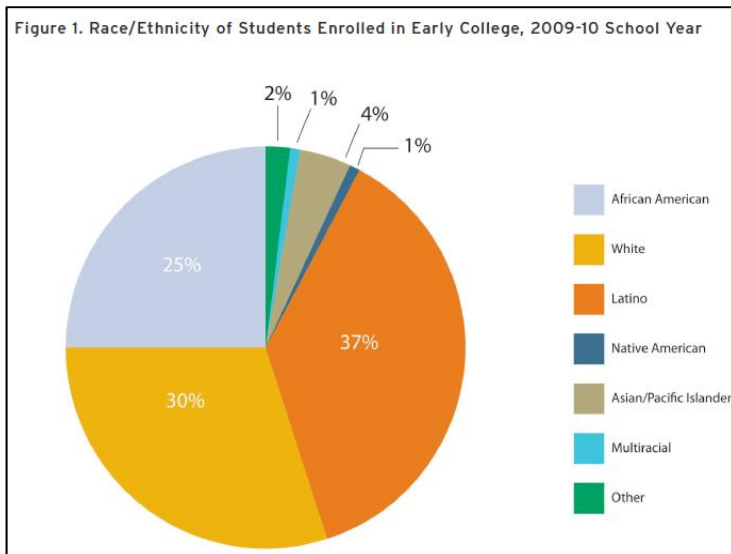
“We’re very excited by this data,” says **Michael Webb, associate vice president at JFF and report author.** “Half of our students would be the first in their families to ever attend college. This is about more than improving students’ college and career success. It’s about changing families’ and communities’ view on college and how obtainable that education can be.”

Unconventional Wisdom: A Profile of the Graduates of Early College High School finds that nearly all early college high school graduates earn some college credit. In 2009, 25 percent of early college school graduates earned an associate’s degree or two years of college credit, while 44 percent earned at least one year of college credit. A substantial number of the college courses

¹ According to the U.S. Department of Labor data, 69 percent of recent high school graduates nationwide were enrolled in college in fall 2008.

taken by early college students were in core academic areas such as math, science, social studies, and English.

According to the study, during the 2009 school year, 70 percent of early college school students were students of color. More specifically, of the 46,493 young people enrolled in early college schools in 2009, 37 percent were Latino and 25 percent were African American (see graph to the right). Fifty-nine percent of all students were classified as eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and nearly half of all students would be the first in their family to attend college. The demographic characteristics of the students have remained relatively consistent from 2007 to 2009, with an average of nearly three-fourths of all students being students of color.



According to JFF, more than half of all early college schools are located on a college campus, with two-year colleges being the most common type of school participating in this study. Postsecondary institutions are important players in the design and day-to-day operations of early college high schools, the report notes, and nearly 75 percent of these schools partner with two-year colleges, 25 percent partner with four-year institutions, and some schools partner with both.

Unconventional Wisdom focuses on early college schools and programs that have been open for four years or more and includes “conversions,” or schools that have restructured to implement an early college design.

To read the full report, visit http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/Unconventional_Wisdom_PDF_033011.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 Roosa 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>.