



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



INCLUSION OF “DEEPER LEARNING” COMPETENCIES VARIES IN STATE WAIVER APPLICATIONS, NEW ALLIANCE REPORT FINDS: Report Argues That Students Need Deeper Learning Skills to Graduate from High School Ready for College and a Career

State applications for waivers under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act vary in the degree to which “deeper learning” skills are reflected in the standards, accountability systems, professional development, and teacher evaluations proposed by states, according to a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education. The report, *Providing Greater Opportunities for Deeper Learning in NCLB Waivers*, finds that state plans tend to generally reflect deeper learning competencies in their college- and career-ready standards but not in their teacher professional development and evaluation systems. It argues that deeper learning provides students with the deep content knowledge they need to succeed after high school and the skills that today’s jobs demand.

“By adopting the common core state standards in English language arts and mathematics, forty-six states and the District of Columbia are saying that all students must be educated to the same high levels of achievement,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “The nation’s education infrastructure needs to respond much more rapidly to support this important shift in goals.”

The report notes that the term “deeper learning” may be new, but its basic competencies are routine educational practice for many accomplished educators as well as some high-performing schools.¹ The U.S. economy can only thrive, argues the report, if the whole population is equipped to succeed in the modern workplace. Meeting this goal requires adopting college- and career-ready standards and ensuring that all teachers have the instructional skills and support needed to create deeper learning in their classrooms.

To determine the extent to which states are coordinating standards, teacher professional development, and teacher evaluations with deeper learning, the Alliance reviewed waiver applications from the eleven states that recently received waivers under NCLB and the twenty-seven additional waiver applications now pending approval from the U.S. Department of Education. In the report, the Alliance chose to feature six states—Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington—to ensure balance in geographic location and between states that earlier received Race to the Top grant funding and those that did not.

¹ Deeper learning competencies prepare students to (1) know and master core academic content; (2) think critically and solve complex problems; (3) work collaboratively; (4) communicate effectively; and (5) be self directed and able to incorporate feedback.

In conducting its analysis, the Alliance focused on three main components: (1) whether state waiver applications define college- and career-ready standards in a way that encourages deeper learning; (2) the extent to which state plans for teacher professional development include instructional strategies for deeper learning competencies; and (3) the extent to which teacher evaluations encourage opportunities for deeper learning.

Regarding the first component, the report finds that most states—including all six featured in the report—define college- and career-ready standards in a way that encourages deeper learning. In Delaware, for example, the state plans to prepare all students for success in the global economy by teaching them to use “critical thinking skills, higher-order thinking skills, and more complex real-world skills,” a definition that reflects several of the deeper learning competencies. Georgia’s definition is similar and says that all students will “graduate from high school with both rigorous content knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge through higher-order skills, including, but not limited to, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration,” a definition that includes four of the five deeper learning competencies.

When it comes to the second and third components—the extent to which deeper learning competencies are reflected in the professional development and teacher evaluation systems proposed by states—the report finds several variations. In Massachusetts, for example, deeper learning competencies are reflected in teacher evaluations, including district-determined measures of student learning across grades and subjects, such as student portfolios and project-based learning. At the other end of the spectrum is Oregon, where deeper learning is reflected in standards for students, but it is not reflected in the state’s plan for professional development and teacher evaluation. Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, and Washington fall somewhere in the middle.

The report cautions that the waiver applications only provide an indicator of states’ plans in regard to deeper learning, but they “can serve as a starting point for encouraging states to evaluate how, and to what extent, they are supporting deeper learning as they implement the policies and practices outlined in their applications.”

The report notes that states will have additional opportunities to incorporate more practices of deeper learning as the application process moves forward and states begin to implement their approved plans. There will also be opportunities for the twenty-seven states with pending applications to incorporate these practices as well. To ensure that deeper learning competencies are better reflected in state plans, the report recommends that policymakers consider the following recommendations:

- Include the five competencies of deeper learning in the state definitions of college and career readiness.
- Provide professional development that focuses on instructional strategies for developing deeper learning competencies.
- Create and implement teacher evaluation systems that measure instructional practices in support of deeper learning such as teacher observations and assessment of student work and performance, including portfolios, project-based learning, and higher-order tests designed to measure these competencies.

Providing Greater Opportunities for Deeper Learning in NCLB Waivers is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/DeeperLearningInNCLBWaivers.pdf>.



NATION'S REPORT CARD: Average Eighth-Grade Science Score Increases; Achievement Gaps Narrow, But Large Gaps Remain

The average eighth-grade science score increased from 150 in 2009 to 152 in 2011, according to the latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in science, also known as the Nation's Report Card. The report card also finds that the percentages of students performing at or above the "basic" and "proficient" levels were higher in 2011 than in 2009, while there was no significant change in the percentage of students at the "advanced" level.

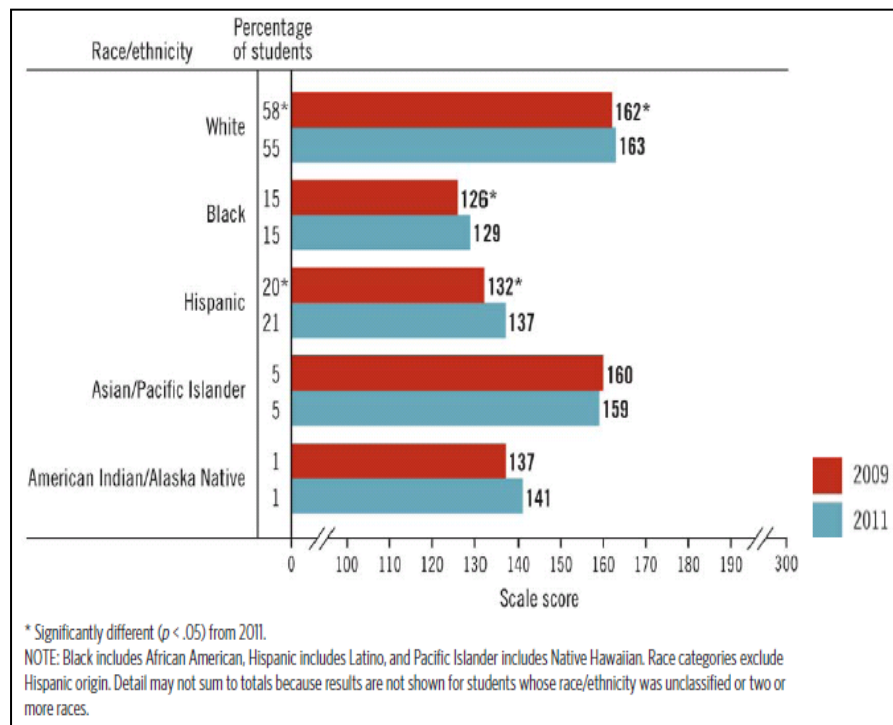
"Science test scores are slightly up, and the achievement gap is narrowing, and that's good news," [said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#). "Today's results offer encouraging signs that our nation's eighth graders are improving in science education. And for the first time, all fifty states participated in the science assessment with no states showing a decline in science scores."

Nationally, 65 percent of eighth graders performed at or above the basic level—a 2-percentage-point gain from 2009. Thirty-two percent of eighth-grade students performed at or above the proficient level—also a 2-percentage-point gain from 2009. Only 2 percent of students performed at the advanced level—the same as in 2009.

Duncan said the lack of change at the advanced level told him that "we need to work harder and faster to build capacity in schools and in districts across the country." He said there was a need to "do things differently," saying "that's why education reform is so critical."

Although racial/ethnic achievement gaps narrowed from 2009 to 2011, large gaps remain between white students and their black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaskan Native peers.

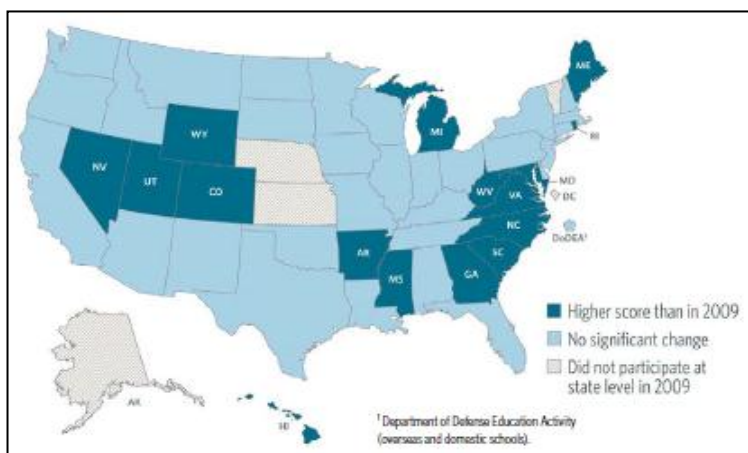
As shown in the graph to the right, the 5-point gain for Hispanic students and the 3-point gain for black students from 2009 to 2011 were larger than the 1-point gain for white students. The average scores of Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native students were not significantly different from 2009 to 2011.



In 2011, additional information on students’ race and ethnicity was collected, making it possible to further break down results for Asian students, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students, and students categorized as being of two or more races. When examining this additional data, stark differences emerged for Asian students, who had an average score of 161, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders, who had an average score of only 139. Students identified as being of two or more races had an average score of 156.

The results also identify large achievement gaps between low-income students, who had an average score of 137, up from 133, and students who were not low income, who had an average score of 164, an increase of 3 points. The 27-point gap between the two groups in 2011 was not significantly different from the 28-point gap in 2009. The report also breaks the results out by sex, finding that eighth-grade male students had an average score of 154—2 points higher than in 2009—while their female peers had an average score of 149, 1 point higher than in 2009.

As Duncan pointed out, 2011 was the first time that all fifty states and the District of Columbia participated. While no states posted a decline, only sixteen states—Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming—increased their scores from 2009 to 2011. As shown in the map to the right, scores were not significantly different in thirty states that administered the test in 2009 and 2011. Alaska, Kansas, Nebraska, and Vermont participated for the first time in 2011.



North Dakota, with an average score of 164, was the highest-performing state while the District of Columbia, at 112, was the lowest-performing. The states with the highest and lowest average scores are represented in the table below.

State	Average Score	State	Average Score
North Dakota	164	District of Columbia	112
Montana	163	Mississippi	137
Vermont	163	Alabama	140
New Hampshire	162	California	140
South Dakota	162	Hawaii	142

The complete results, including state-by-state breakdowns, are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012465.pdf>.



MAPPING A PERSONALIZED LEARNING JOURNEY: New Report Links Students' Interest in STEM to Technology in Classroom

A survey of students and educators finds children are more likely to have an interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields when their classroom's instructional model incorporates personalized learning strategies, digital technology, and social media. The survey results are contained in *Mapping a Personalized Learning Journey—K–12 Students and Parents Connect the Dots with Digital Learning*, from Project Tomorrow's Speak Up 2011 National Research Project, which gathered its data from an online survey completed by more than 416,000 K–12 students, parents, teachers, administrators.

“This is the first time we've noticed this correlation between the type of math and science instruction and the students' interest in STEM careers,” said **Julie Evans, chief executive officer of Project Tomorrow**. “For a nation concerned with developing the next generations of scientists, engineers, and innovators, this finding should raise some eyebrows.”

According to the report, only 20 percent of children in traditional classrooms—where instruction is teacher centered and the use of technology is minimal or nonexistent—expressed an interest in pursuing STEM fields, compared to 27 percent of technology-infused classrooms with both student-directed and teacher-directed instruction models.

However, only 9 percent of students surveyed said they had a math or science class that was both teacher and student directed and provided consistent use of technology tools as support for students and teachers. Meanwhile, 43 percent of math and science classes were teacher directed and only included lectures, textbook assignments, group projects, and labs. Thirty-three percent of students said they had teacher-directed classrooms that utilize at least one technology-based instructional resource.

The report argues that the impending implementation of the common core state standards and the assessments that will accompany them, combined with the “continuing national self-interest in attracting more students to the STEM fields,” gives a “greater urgency” to transforming the in-school learning process through personalization enabled by technology.

“For three-quarters of today's students in grades 6–12, math and science class is still much like it was when we adults were in school: predominately teacher centered with little or no opportunities for students to direct their own learning, at their own pace, with their own tools,” Evans notes. “Think about that in contrast to what is being called for by the new common core standards for math. The common core approach is based on teachers laying out a specific task and inviting the students to dig in and solve the problem using appropriate tools and resources. If our schools are able to implement this type of teaching and learning, the potential for interest in math and science should grow.”

The report also examines the use of social media in a learning environment and finds that, among high school students, participation in online communities through discussion boards and chats has doubled and the use of collaborative writing resources, such as Google Docs and Yahoo! Groups, has increased 57 percent since 2008.

Mapping a Personalized Learning Journey offers education experts the opportunity to gauge personalized learning and varied instructional models from the perspective of a student. It is the first in a two-part series based on the 2011 Speak Up national findings. The second report will offer educators' perspectives and will include new data on how teachers are personalizing learning with a variety of emerging technology tools and strategies.

Download *Mapping a Personalized Learning Journey* at http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup/2012_PersonalizedLearning.html.



PREPARING ALL TEACHERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: New Report Identifies Promising Practices With ELL Students That General Education Teachers Can Employ

Noting that an estimated 25 percent of children in the United States are from immigrant families and live in households where a language other than English is spoken, a new report from the Center for American Progress offers promising practices that all teachers can employ when working with these students. Drawing from recent research identifying what English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and bilingual teachers should know, the report applies foundational knowledge about English language learners (ELLs) that could serve all teachers, including general education teachers, who educate these students in their classrooms.

“The reality is that most, if not all teachers have or can expect to have English Language Learner (ELL) students in their classroom and therefore must be prepared to best support these children,” the report reads. “In many cases a general education teacher who knows the content and pedagogy to teach to the grade level standards will also need specific knowledge and skills to help ELLs across the curricula.”

The report, *Preparing All Teachers to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners: Applying Research to Policy and Practice for Teacher Effectiveness*, says state adoption of the common core state standards and the move toward high-stakes evaluation of teachers provide an opportunity for implementing “purposeful” teacher effectiveness initiatives that have promise for improving outcomes among the nation’s least-served students, including ELLs.

According to the report, ELLs need special attention particularly because of their growing numbers and low performance, as compared to non-ELL students. And while research has begun to identify the critical knowledge and skills that specialized teachers of ELLs should have, the report finds that there has been “relatively little” attention paid to the essential standards, knowledge, and skills that general education teachers need to provide to ELL students.

Based on research identifying what ESL and bilingual teachers should know, the report recognizes areas of knowledge that general education teachers need to serve ELL students. Specifically, the report cites the importance of attending to oral language development, supporting academic language, and encouraging teachers’ cultural sensitivity to the backgrounds of their students.

To ensure that these areas of knowledge “be purposefully and explicitly integrated into the preparation, certification, evaluation, and development of all teachers in the interest of improving outcomes for English language learners,” the report recommends that consistent and specific guidelines on these areas be addressed in

- a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind;
- revisions to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards;
- state regulations;
- teacher preparation programs;
- state certification exams;
- teacher-observation rubrics in performance evaluations; and
- professional development linked to teacher evaluations.

“In order to make significant progress in improving the outcomes for ELLs, sweeping changes are needed in the way that teachers are prepared and supported to better serve this growing population,” the report notes. “Given the current reform efforts in learning standards and teacher evaluations, a unique opportunity exists to get things right for all students, including ELLs whose subpar educational performance requires urgent attention.”

The report also compares and contrasts five key states—California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas—that have large numbers of ELLs and examines to what extent the specific needs of ELLs are accounted for in educational policies and school-level practices.

Preparing All Teachers to Meet the Needs of English Language Learners: Applying Research to Policy and Practice for Teacher Effectiveness is available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2012/04/pdf/ell_report.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; Kenya Downs, communications associate; 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>.