



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS: U.S. Department of Education Would Receive Slight Funding Increase Under Senate Committee Bill; Final Action Not Expected Until After November Elections

The U.S. Department of Education would receive \$45.7 billion in discretionary funding in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 under the appropriations bill that the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee passed on June 14. The total, which does not include Pell Grants, is a slight increase of approximately \$400 million compared to last year and is \$1.3 billion less than President Obama requested in his FY 2013 budget in February. The action by the Senate Appropriations Committee is a single step in a long process. Final FY 2013 funding levels for education programs are not expected until after the November elections.

“This bill trains and protects American workers, provides the nation’s youth with the skills they need to succeed, funds life-saving medical research, and targets fraud and abuse,” [said U.S. Senator Tom Harkin \(D-IA\)](#), chairman of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee.

Under the Senate committee’s bill, Title I, which would receive \$14.62 billion, and special education state grants, which would receive \$11.68 billion, would each receive a \$100 million increase compared to last year. Promise Neighborhoods, a competitive grant program that awards funding to nonprofit, community-based organizations that work in high-poverty areas to improve educational and life outcomes, would receive a \$20 million increase, from \$60 million to \$80 million. Additionally, Statewide Data Systems would receive a \$15 million increase, from \$38 million to \$53 million.

The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program, which targets the nation’s lowest-performing schools, would receive \$534 million, the same as last year. In exchange for receiving SIG funding, a school must implement one of four school improvement models: (1) transformation, in which a school must replace the school principal and implement three other specific reforms; (2) turnaround, which is similar to transformation with the primary difference being that the school could rehire no more than 50 percent of the school staff; (3) restart, which requires the school to become a charter or privately managed school; or (4) school closure.

Referencing [recent research reports on the SIG program](#), the Senate bill notes that local capacity, such as the ability to attract and retain administrative staff with school turnaround expertise or high-quality teachers, “influenced” implementation and made SIG interventions “challenging” for low-capacity districts. Consequently, the [Senate bill includes new language](#) that would add a

research-proven, whole-school reform model as a fifth option, making it possible for schools to partner with programs that work on school turnaround.

Among programs serving middle and high school students, Striving Readers and the High School Graduation Initiative would each receive the same funding amounts as last year, \$160 million and \$49 million, respectively. Career and technical education state grants would receive \$1.12 billion, which is also the same as last year. TRIO and GEAR UP programs were also level-funded, at \$840 million and \$302 million, respectively.

Race to the Top would receive \$549 million under the bill, the same as last year, but less than the \$850 million that President Obama requested in his budget. Originally, the program was set to receive a \$50 million increase, but an amendment by **U.S. Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), top Republican on the Senate Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee**, transferred \$50 million from Race to the Top to the Math and Science Partnerships program.

“In my home state of Alabama, federal funds from the Math and Science Partnerships program have helped finance the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative, which is a leading model for math and science education reform nationwide,” [Shelby said in a statement](#). “A recent Department of Education–funded study found that students who attended schools taught by teachers that participated in this initiative made gains that compare to an average of twenty-eight extra days of schooling in math.”

Shelby’s amendment would boost funding for math and science partnerships from \$99 million to \$150 million. Had the program been funded below \$100 million, Shelby pointed out, money would have been distributed on a competitive basis to select states, rather than on a formula basis to every state.

The Senate committee’s bill would also increase the maximum Pell Grant award from \$5,550 to \$5,635, the first increase since the 2010–11 school year. Harkin also noted that the bill includes a new provision that would ban colleges or universities from using federal educational resources on marketing, recruitment, and advertising.

“At a time when budgets are tight and students and families across the nation are struggling, taxpayer dollars that are intended for higher education should be focused on helping low- and middle-income students pursue an academic degree,” Harkin said. “Colleges and universities will still be free to spend however much they want on marketing, recruiting, and advertising. They just shouldn’t use taxpayer dollars that are intended for student aid to do so.”

It is unknown when the bill will go to the Senate floor for consideration. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the House Appropriations Committee has yet to take up its version of the bill and is not expected to do so until early- to mid-July at the earliest.

Funding levels for all education programs as allocated by the Senate Appropriations Committee are available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget13/13action.pdf>. The table also includes funding levels from FY 2012 and as proposed in President Obama’s FY 2013 budget.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FACING “DEVASTATING” SPENDING CUTS IN JANUARY 2013: Senators Plan Details Impact of Automatic Spending Cuts

As mentioned in the previous article, final Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 funding levels for the U.S. Department of Education are not expected until after the November elections, at which time the U.S. Congress is expected to return for a “lame duck” session to consider unfinished appropriations bill. Additionally, Congress may also address the looming cuts to military and domestic spending that were triggered when the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, aka the “supercommittee,” failed to agree on a plan to reduce the nation’s deficit.

These automatic across-the-board cuts totaling \$1.2 trillion, formally called “sequestration,” will go into effect in January 2013 unless Congress acts to change them by agreeing to a mix of tax increases and spending cuts to offset the amount.

Earlier this year, [U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said](#) the impact of these cuts would be “both significant and very negative [and], in a word ... devastating.” He said the cuts, which would result in a 7.8 percent drop in domestic discretionary spending, would make it “impossible” to achieve the Department of Education’s fundamental mission to prepare students for college and a career. Specifically, Duncan noted that Title I would be cut by \$1.2 billion, denying funding to nearly 4,000 schools serving more than 1.6 million disadvantaged students and could result in more than 16,000 teachers and aides losing their jobs.

In a recent article, the [New York Times](#) notes that cuts to the defense budget have received a great deal of attention from lawmakers while other government programs, which are facing equally large cuts, have “received a scintilla of the attention and outrage that the planned Pentagon cuts have attracted.” In an effort to shine a light on the cuts that all programs are facing, the U.S. Senate recently passed an amendment by **Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and John McCain (R-AZ)** that would compel the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the U.S. Department of Defense to deliver a report on the impact of all of the planned reductions.

“This bipartisan compromise will make sure Congress gets reports on the impact of all aspects of sequestration, both defense and nondefense,” said Murray. “I was proud to work with Senator McCain to come to this bipartisan agreement today. Our amendment calls for an examination of the impact of automatic cuts to the Defense Department, as well as the painful cuts to education, food safety, border patrol, and so many of the programs middle class families and the most vulnerable Americans depend on.”

The amendment calls on the Department of Defense to release a report by August 15 on the impact of defense sequestration. It also calls on OMB to release a report within thirty days and President Obama to release a report within sixty days on the impact of all of sequestration, across both defense and nondefense spending. Although the amendment has yet to become law, observers believe it will pass in the coming weeks.

More information on the Murray/McCain amendment is available at <http://bit.ly/Oh7j3d>.



“A FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION”: Improving CTE Programs Are Critical to Transforming Nation’s Secondary Schools, Says New Alliance Policy Brief

By better integrating academic, career and technical education, and work-based learning, the nation’s secondary schools can increase student engagement, boost student achievement, and provide students with more options after they graduate from high school, according to a new policy brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education.

“The traditional American high school has long represented a critical decision point at which students must choose to pursue college or a career; but in today’s economy, students need both,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “When delivered properly, career and technical education keeps students engaged in their schoolwork, offers real-life relevancy through connections to the workforce, and, when combined with a college-prep curriculum, it provides the academic rigor students need to succeed in additional education after high school—a must in today’s economy.”

The nation’s largest federal investment in career and technical education (CTE) is the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Educational Improvement Act (Perkins). When the U.S. Congress last reauthorized the program in 2006, it placed greater emphasis on improving the academic achievement of CTE students, adding greater program accountability, and strengthening the link between secondary and postsecondary education.

The new Alliance brief, “A Framework for Advancing Career and Technical Education: Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Act,” suggests that Congress build on these changes by ensuring that CTE is relevant, engaging, high quality, and aligned with career demands. It says federal funding should target youth who traditionally lack access to these types of educational opportunities that prepare them to be college and career ready. The brief argues that opportunities to participate in CTE programs should not be limited to just those attending well-resourced schools; they should be available to *all* students. Nor should these programs be used to track students into less-rigorous pathways that diminish their future opportunities.

The brief urges policymakers to better align Perkins with the Workforce Investment Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to ensure that all relevant federal policies and programs are focused on ensuring that all students have the opportunity to graduate from high school ready for college and a career.

“The reauthorization of Perkins can ensure that CTE programs are no longer viewed as something separate and distinct from a high-quality twenty-first-century education,” said Wise. “By providing all students with the preparation and opportunity to succeed in college, a career, and life, high-quality CTE programs can be catalysts in driving the needed reforms in education.”

The brief offers four recommendations for how federal policy can improve Perkins:

- (1) Provide all students with the opportunity to participate in high-quality CTE programs that prepare them to be college and career ready.
- (2) Increase the integration of academics, CTE, and work-based learning to incorporate the knowledge and skills that are necessary for college and career success.
- (3) Support successful transitions between secondary and postsecondary education by providing ongoing access to academic and career counseling, and through other efforts such as dual enrollment.
- (4) Strengthen strategic partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions and support the participation of employers, community-based organizations, and other key stakeholders in raising the quality of CTE programs.

“Successful strategies, such as the Linked Learning approach implemented in California, offer a model for what career and technical education should aspire to do,” said Wise. “By connecting strong academics and demanding technical education with real-world experiences in a wide range of high-growth occupations, such as engineering and health, Linked Learning helps to eliminate the gap between what students learn in the classroom and what they learn on the job. The end results are high school graduates who are better prepared to succeed in college and a career and employers who are more satisfied with their workers.”

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

In conjunction with the policy brief, the Alliance released proposed legislative language for the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Act, which is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/PerkinsLegRecs.pdf>.



SCIENCE IN ACTION: NAEP Report Finds Students Lacking in Ability to Apply Science Knowledge in Real-Life Experiments

A new report measuring fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders’ abilities to apply their science knowledge in lab experiments finds that most students can select correct conclusions from a scientific investigation, but they face difficulty when asked to select correct conclusions *and* explain their results.

“That tells us that our science teaching isn’t getting us as far as we need to go,” **Chris Dede, professor from Harvard Graduate School of Education**, told the [Associated Press](#).

The report, *Science in Action: Hands-On and Interactive Computer Tasks from the 2009 Science Assessment*, contains data from (1) hands-on tasks, and (2) interactive computer tasks (ICTs) that were administered as part of the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). These tasks ask students to work in a laboratory setting—either real or simulated—to answer open-ended scenarios that require a deeper level of planning, analysis, and synthesis. The tasks measure how well students can combine their knowledge with real-world investigative skills.

Hands-on tasks are forty minutes long and require students to use materials and laboratory equipment to perform actual science experiments. ICTs are either twenty or forty minutes long

and require students to solve scientific problems in a computer-based environment often by simulating a natural or laboratory setting. Both types of tasks measure how well students can **predict** what might happen in a real-world science situation, conduct an investigation and **observe** what happens, and **explain** the observations by interpreting data or drawing conclusions.

Although NAEP tests have included hands-on tasks since 1996, the 2009 administration of the test represents the first time computers were used. **Alan Friedman, chairman of the National Assessment Governing Board’s Assessment Development Committee**, told the Associated Press that the ICTs “went beyond what had previously been measured, testing how students ran their own experiments in simulated natural or laboratory environments with the ability to go back, adjust variables, and correct their mistakes on a computer.”

Friedman said the computer tests are “dramatically more expensive” to design but added that traditional assessments cannot measure the same skills. “This is a set of skills, which, in the real world, is invaluable and which, before this, we’d never been able to know if students could do this or not,” Friedman said.

At the twelfth-grade level, for example, one ICT required students to investigate the role of phytoplankton—microscopic, plant-like organisms that live near the ocean surface—in the earth’s carbon cycle. Students also had to analyze an authentic set of experimental data relating levels of iron and nutrients to the growth of phytoplankton, and use a resource library to research ocean locations where increased iron levels might affect phytoplankton growth. On this computer assessment, twelfth graders correctly answered 27 percent of questions, on average.

For the non-computer-based, hands-on tasks, twelfth-grade students were asked to determine which of two sites would be the better location for building a new town based on which site might have the better water quality. To complete the task, students test water samples from both sites to determine whether they meet federal standards for various pollutants and then provide a final recommendation based on their results. A video demonstrating how students complete the task is available to the right.



The report broke the task down into several different steps and measured student performance on each. For step one, **predict**, 64 percent of students explained their preliminary recommendations with valid support based on materials in the kits. In step two, **observe**, 75 percent of twelfth graders could perform a straightforward investigation to test the water samples and accurately tabulate data, but only 11 percent were able to provide a valid final recommendation by supporting their conclusions with details from the data for step three, **explain**. In total, twelfth-graders answered an average of 40 percent of questions correctly on hands-on tasks.

When asked to complete further steps to extend their inquiry, only 14 percent of students could correctly evaluate water treatment steps needed to remove pollutants that exceed national

drinking water standards for step four; only 28 percent could describe the scientific processes used to remove water pollutants for step five, according to the report.

Katherine Carroll, an eleventh- and twelfth-grade chemistry teacher in Waterboro, Maine, told the *Associated Press* that even her best students struggle to explain their conclusions in their lab reports. “Teachers have moved toward teaching more knowledge, as opposed to the understanding behind that knowledge,” Carroll said.

As shown in the table to the right, females scored higher than their male counterparts on the hands-on tasks, even though males scored higher on the traditional paper-and-pencil science assessment. The report also identifies significant gaps between the scores of white and Asian/Pacific Islander students and their black and Hispanic classmates.

		Gender		Race/ethnicity			
		Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander
Predict	Step 1	63	64	68	39	58	76
	Step 2	74	76	84	50	59	66
Observe	Step 3	9	13	13	3	6	17
	Step 4	17	11	17	1	6	13
Explain	Step 5	30	27	31	13	19	39
Extend							

The report also includes a survey asking students questions about their experiences in science class. It finds that 57 percent of eighth graders had teachers who reported at least a moderate emphasis on developing scientific writing skills. However, only 28 percent of twelfth graders said they wrote a report on a science project at least once a week. Additionally, only 51 percent of twelfth-grade students said they designed a science experiment at least once every few weeks. The report also finds that only 53 percent of twelfth graders reported that they were currently taking a science course.

Quoting **Peggy Carr, associate commissioner at the National Center for Education Statistics**, the *Associated Press* reports that although the tests “raised significant questions about students’ abilities to apply scientific knowledge to the real world,” students did seem to enjoy taking the tests. The article said Carr usually observes students losing interest in the traditional NAEP tests. “Not so with these assessments,” Carr said.

The full report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2009/2012468.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; 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>.