



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



DEBATING EDUCATION: Obama and Romney Promote Education Records, Importance of Education to the Economy and Public Safety During Final Debates

Although education was not a big topic during the final two presidential debates, both **President Barack Obama** and **former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney** linked education's importance to the nation's economy and public safety while promoting education reforms they support as president and governor, respectively. One possible issue of contention that emerged between the candidates was the issue of immigration and how each administration would treat the children of illegal immigrants.



In response to a question during the October 16 town hall debate on illegal immigrants who are productive members of society, Romney expressed support for giving green cards to people who graduate with valuable skills, such as math and science. When discussing pathways to citizenship, Romney said military service could be one way that children of illegal immigrants could become permanent residents, but he stopped short of saying he would grant citizenship to children who went to college. The citizenship-through-higher-education pathway is a provision in the DREAM Act, which is currently pending before the U.S. Congress. During the January 17 Republican debate, Romney stated his opposition to the DREAM Act: "I would veto the DREAM Act if provisions included in that act say that people who are here illegally, if they go to school here long enough, get a degree here that they can become permanent residents."

Obama, who mentioned Romney's opposition to the DREAM Act during their October 16 town hall, fully supports the DREAM Act, but he has not been able to get favorable Congressional action.

Both candidates used a question on a possible ban on AK-47s and other assault weapons as a way to insert their education positions and stressed the importance of good schools to ensuring that children have a productive future. Obama talked about providing young people with opportunities through good schools while working with faith groups and law enforcement to "catch [violence] before it gets out of control." He expressed support for a comprehensive policy

that would get automatic weapons out of the hands of criminals and the mentally ill, but would also discourage violent action before it occurs. “If our young people have opportunity, then they are less likely to engage in these kinds of violent acts,” Obama said.

Romney agreed with Obama’s focus on good schools and said the nation had to change its culture of violence. “I believe if we do a better job in education, we’ll give people the hope and opportunity they deserve and perhaps less violence from that,” Romney said. He also stressed the important role that parents—particularly both parents in the home—can play in raising their children. “If there’s a two-parent family, the prospect of living in poverty goes down dramatically,” Romney said. “The opportunities that the child will be able to achieve increase dramatically.”

During the October 16 town hall—as well as the October 22 debate on foreign policy—both candidates highlighted their education records. Romney pointed to Massachusetts’s reputation for having the best public schools in the country and noted that fourth and eighth graders in Massachusetts tested first in the nation in math and English when he was governor. He also promoted his ability to work with Republicans and Democrats to “put in place education principles that focused on having great teachers in the classroom” and gave Massachusetts’s students a graduation exam to determine whether they had the skills necessary to compete in the workforce.

For higher education, Romney discussed a scholarship program that gave four years of free tuition at a Massachusetts public institution of higher education to Massachusetts students who graduated in the top quarter of their class. He also said he wanted to “make it easier for kids to afford college” and keep the Pell grant program going and continue the federal student loan program.

In both debates, Obama said he wanted the United States to “have the best education system in the world” and promoted education reforms his administration has supported. He discussed the move by forty-six states and the District of Columbia to adopt the Common Core State Standards that raise expectations for all students. Referring to the School Improvement Grant program, Obama said some of the nation’s lowest-performing schools were starting to improve. He talked about gains in student achievement in math and science and programs with community colleges to retrain workers, including young people who may have dropped out of school. Obama also talked about his work to expand the Pell grant program, reforms he made to the student loan program, and the importance of community colleges to retraining workers for jobs in today’s economy.

During the October 22 debate focused on foreign policy, Obama talked about hiring more teachers in math and science and keeping class sizes low. “If you talk to teachers, they will tell you [class size] does make a difference,” Obama said. “And if we’ve got math teachers who are able to provide the kind of support that they need for our kids, that’s what’s going to determine whether or not the new businesses are created here.” Obama also took Romney to task for budget proposals that, Obama said, would “slash support for education” and undermine the nation’s long-term competitiveness.

Romney promoted his plan to make the United States “the most attractive place in the world to start businesses, to build jobs, to grow the economy,” but he stressed that it was not going to happen by just hiring teachers. “I love teachers, and I’m happy to have states and communities that want to hire teachers do that,” Romney said. “By the way, I don’t like to have the federal government start pushing its weight deeper and deeper into our schools. Let the states and localities do that. I was a governor. The federal government didn’t hire our teachers.”

With Election Day less than a week away and polls tightening nationally and in battleground states, both candidates are expected to spend most of their time on the ground in states, such as Florida, Ohio, and Virginia that will ultimately help decide the nation’s next president. To keep up with the latest news surrounding the presidential election, as well as updated national polls and polls from battleground states, visit <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/>.

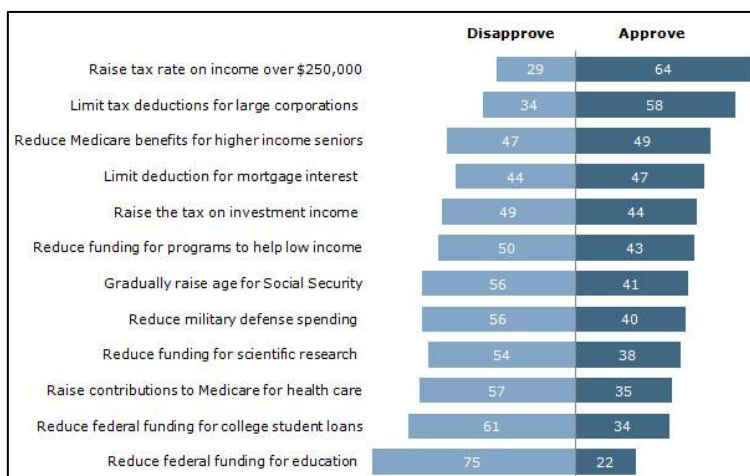
Video and transcripts from the October 16 and October 22 debates are available at <http://www.debates.org/>.



NO DEAL: Americans Believe Cuts to Federal Education Funding Should Not Be Part of Plan to Reduce Debt or Deficit, Poll Finds

Three out of four Americans oppose reducing federal education funding to lessen the debt and deficit, according to a recent poll from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The poll also finds that more than 60 percent of Americans oppose cutting federal funding for college loans.

As shown in the image to the right, only two of the twelve specific options tested—raising taxes on annual incomes over \$250,000 and limiting corporate tax deductions—won approval from a majority of the public. Meanwhile, cutting funding for the two education options received the least amount of support in the poll.



Although support for federal education funding held—regardless of preferred presidential candidate—registered voters who support **former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney** were less likely to oppose cuts to federal education funding than supporters of **President Barack Obama**. Specifically, 64 percent of Romney voters oppose federal education funding cuts compared to 83 percent who favor Obama.

Opposition to reducing federal funding for college student loans was not as clear among Romney voters, with 50 percent opposing cuts and 45 percent in favor. Among Obama voters, 75 percent opposed cuts to college loans, compared to 24 percent in favor.

The poll finds wide differences among Romney and Obama voters regarding raising taxes on individuals making \$250,000 or more, with 84 percent of Obama voters in favor of raising taxes, compared to only 41 percent of Romney voters. Similar differences are present on reducing military spending and raising the tax rate on investment income, with a majority of Obama voters in favor of both and a majority of Romney voters against both.

The poll was conducted October 4–7 among a national sample of 1,511 adults, eighteen years of age or older, living in all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

The complete poll results are available at <http://www.people-press.org/2012/10/12/deep-divisions-over-debt-reduction-proposals/>.

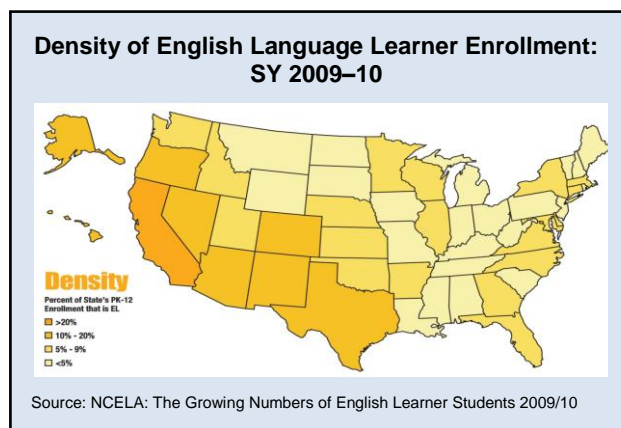


RETHINKING POLICY AND PRACTICE IN SUPPORT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: New Alliance Report Identifies Challenges and Solutions for Helping ELLs Meet Higher Expectations Associated with Common Core

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) offer great promise for advancing the quality of education and outcomes for all students, but meeting the higher expectations associated with them could prove especially daunting for the rapidly growing population of English language learners (ELLs)—students who must learn grade-level content while simultaneously trying to master the English language. A new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education discusses these challenges, highlights initiatives already underway to help ELLs meet these challenges, and outlines how policy and practice must change to help ELLs graduate ready for college and a career.

“Now more than ever, all students in the United States need to function fully in the English language to succeed in a highly competitive, knowledge-based economy,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “That’s why English language learners should be held to the same rigorous standards as non-ELL students. At the same time, expecting ELLs to do double the work without appropriate learning strategies and commensurate support is a recipe for disaster, especially as these students account for larger percentages of the student population.”

According to the report, *The Role of Language and Literacy in College- and Career-Ready Standards: Rethinking Policy and Practice in Support of English Language Learners*, the number of school-age children who spoke another language in the home more than doubled, from 4.7 million (10 percent) to 11.2 million (20 percent) between 1980 and 2009. By 2020, more than half of all public school students are likely to have a non-English-speaking background.



Although the vast majority of ELLs speak Spanish, nearly 300 different languages are spoken among students in U.S. public schools. Among ELLs in U.S. middle and high schools, 57 percent were born in the United States while 43 percent were born in another country.

Unfortunately, despite forty years of federal investment in programs for ELLs, these students have not fared well in American schools. According to the 2011 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) twelfth-grade reading exam, 77 percent of ELLs performed below the basic level, compared to 27 percent of their non-ELL peers; only 3 percent of ELLs scored at or above proficient. Results are similarly discouraging at the state level.

The report attributes the lack of progress at both the federal and state levels to a combination of curriculum design, instruction, and a lack of systemic interventions and other support for ELLs. For example, English as a second language (ESL) programs historically focused on a one-size-fits-all approach that placed a premium on grammar and correctness rather than understanding and communicating ideas. The problem has been compounded in secondary schools, where the tendency exists to lower academic demands and limit opportunities for students to speak, read, or write about the content they are learning. The report argues that such an approach is no longer acceptable in today's economy where students must obtain deeper learning competencies that include the mastery of academic content plus creative and critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and self-reflection.

The CCSS in English language arts and mathematics, which have been adopted by forty-six states and the District of Columbia, as well as the Next Generation Science Standards, in development by a consortium of twenty-six states, reflect the skills needed in today's global economy. The standards also spell out the sophisticated language competencies that students will need to perform in the respective academic subject areas, but helping ELLs reach these higher expectations will place new demands on teachers, the report finds.

To help all teachers make this transition, the report lists ten key strategies for language and content learning that all teachers must understand given the growing number of ELLs. It also highlights reform efforts already underway such as Formative Language Assessment Records for English Language Learners (FLARE), which is developing a formative assessment system that will provide teachers with practical tools for keeping English learners on track for language development and academic success.

Teachers will not be the only individuals affected, the report notes. Teachers, principals, and district and state leaders will need to re-envision curriculum, instruction, and assessment to help ELLs access grade-level content while building their language proficiency at the same time.

“Improving the performance of ELLs requires teachers to shift their thinking about what effective teaching practice looks like, why students struggle to succeed, and what is needed to improve language and content learning,” said **Mariana Haynes, senior fellow at the Alliance for Excellent Education and author of the report**. “At the same time, the adoption of new standards provides an opportunity to reimagine the core instruction in high school classrooms that has left large numbers of students—not just those identified as ELLs—struggling to achieve grade-level performance.”

In addition, emerging technologies should enable teachers to amplify and extend relevant instructional time for ELLs, the report finds. Digital tools can increase access to content anywhere and anytime, provide approaches to learning vocabulary and content, support language acquisition, expand practice opportunities, and deliver timely feedback.

Because the report finds that states bear the primary responsibility for ensuring that teachers and school leaders can provide ELLs with effective language and content-area learning, its recommendations are focused on the state level. It urges states to ensure robust implementation of college- and career-ready standards and calls on states to develop and adopt English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards that incorporate the language demands in the college- and career-ready standards. The report recommends that states support flexible pathways by which ELLs can successfully transition through language development programs and into the regular curriculum. It also asks states to strengthen teacher preparation, improve use of data, and create support systems for students, teachers, schools, districts, and states.

The Role of Language and Literacy in College- and Career-Ready Standards: Rethinking Policy and Practice in Support of English Language Learners is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/LangAndLiteracyInStandardsELLs.pdf>.

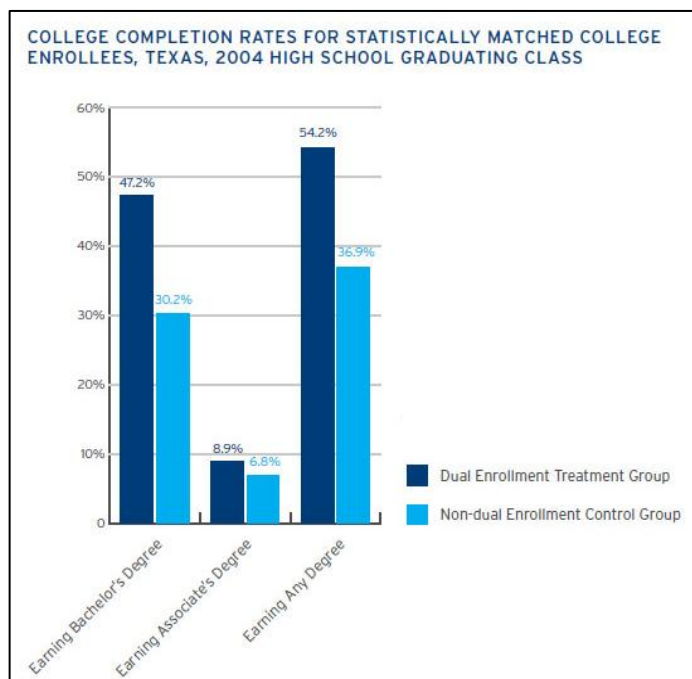


TAKING COLLEGE COURSES IN HIGH SCHOOL: Dual Enrollment Doubles the Credits, Doubles the Success in College, Report Finds

Students who take college-level courses while in high school are more than one and a half times more likely to enroll in, persist through, and complete college, according to a new study of more than 30,000 Texas high school graduates by the education nonprofit Jobs for the Future (JFF). The report, *Taking College Courses in High School: A Strategy for College Readiness*, argues that dual enrollment, in which high school students complete courses for college and high school credit, may be key to states and school districts increasing college and career readiness.

“A big question in education reform has been: ‘How do we increase the college readiness of those most likely not to go?’” said **Joel Vargas, report coauthor and president of JFF’s High School Through College project**. “Dual enrollment is a strategy states can use to help answer that question.”

As shown in the graph to the right, 47.2 percent of students who completed a college course while still in high school earned a bachelor’s degree within six



years, compared to 30.2 percent of students who did not.

This positive effect held across income and race, the report finds. For example, low-income students were 2.41 times more likely to attend college after completing dual enrollment than those who did not.

The report also finds that individual dual-enrollment courses may be stronger indicators of success than others. Specifically, students who completed English language arts courses through dual enrollment were 2.75 times more likely to enroll in college than those who did not. On the other hand, students who took a physical education class through dual enrollment were only 1.40 times more likely to enroll in college than students who did not.

To take advantage of the positive impacts of dual enrollment, the report recommends that policymakers at the state and federal levels increase preparation and access to dual enrollment programs, especially for low-income and minority students. It also calls for more research to determine which college courses students need most to prepare them for college. Specifically, it says states should collect more data around the college-course subject areas that are offered, the number of courses that students complete, whether the courses are located on a college or high school campus, and whether the instructor is a full-time college instructor or an adjunct professor.

Overall, the report urges policymakers to encourage states to adopt and expand their dual-enrollment programs.

“We’re excited to add to a growing body of research evidence strongly suggesting that dual enrollment improved education outcomes for all populations, including those currently underrepresented in higher education,” said **Ben Struhl, coauthor of the report and senior project manager at JFF**.

Read the full study online at http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/TakingCollegeCourses_101712.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; Cyndi Waite; and Kate Bradley.

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>.