



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



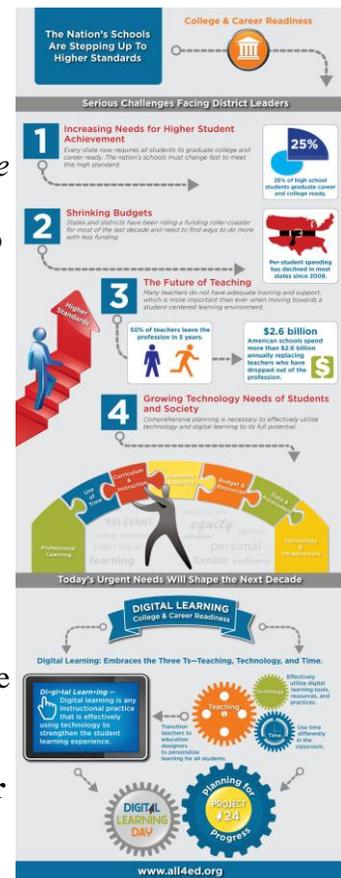
STEPPING UP: Alliance Launches Major Effort to Inform School District Leaders About Decisions Affecting the Future of Education

While the U.S. Congress must confront crucial economic issues this month, every school, district, and state leader must make critical decisions in the next two years involving digital learning that will shape education for decades, according to a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education. The report, *The Nation's Schools Are Stepping Up to Higher Standards*, identifies four key challenges that public school district leaders must systemically address in the next two years and outlines the essential elements for developing a comprehensive digital strategy.

The report, plus the infographic and webinar (see box below) accompanying its release, are the first steps in a major effort by the Alliance to help district leaders make smart, far-reaching decisions about implementing education technology that support teachers and improve student outcomes in K–12 public schools. (Click on the infographic to the right to access the [interactive version](#)).

“As I travel across the United States talking to district leaders from large urban city centers to the most rural areas of the country, I hear the same thing: ‘We’ve come a long way, but we have so far to go in effectively using technology to benefit student learning,’” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “If you’re a school or district leader who is considering using education technology and digital learning in your schools, STOP—and go no further—until you have a comprehensive plan that addresses your district’s specific challenges and learning goals for all students.”

The four key challenges identified in the report that all school district leaders need to face include: (1) graduating all students college and career ready; (2) managing shrinking budgets; (3) training and supporting teachers; and (4) dealing with the growing technology needs of society and individual students, especially low-income students and students of color who are most at-risk of being left behind. By employing effective educational strategies that link and improve the “three Ts”—teaching, technology, and use of time—district leaders can create the conditions for whole-school reform and effective instruction, the report finds.



According to Wise and the Alliance, many school districts have already stepped up to address these challenges by developing comprehensive plans for digital learning strategies and will serve as examples to others in the next two years, while other districts are in the process of implementing aspects of digital learning. On the other hand, far too many districts have yet to begin preparation.

“Whatever stage a district is in,” Wise said, “there is real value in taking a self assessment to make sure your district’s technology strategies meet its educational needs, including changing curriculum and instruction.”

The major force driving the need to change is the move by all states to raise academic expectations by requiring students to graduate from high school ready for college and a career. For forty-six states and the District of Columbia, adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) also requires using technology to prepare students for computer-administered assessments in the 2014–15 school year.

If schools and districts adopt a comprehensive digital learning strategy, the effective application of technology assists in the implementation of the CCSS by supporting profound changes to teaching and learning. Technology also plays a critical role guiding educational, administrative, budgetary, and policy decisions by providing constant data about student and school performance to educators, parents, students, and policymakers.

The Alliance, which will be partnering with national membership organizations on this initiative, has identified a framework that will provide education leaders in states and school districts with tools to make good decisions about how technology aligns with the goals and vision for their students. This growing effort, which includes access to a team of experts, a self assessment tool, and other resources, will help districts through a comprehensive planning process around seven interconnected areas within the education system where technology and digital learning can maximize the impact on student achievement:

- academic supports;
- budget and resources;
- curriculum and instruction;
- data systems and online assessments;
- professional learning;
- technology and infrastructure; and
- use of time.

“The next two years will see unprecedented developments in K–12 public education as states implement fundamentally higher-than-ever standards for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds,” said Wise. “Technology can play a vital role in supporting teachers and helping public schools and districts meet these challenges, but technology by itself is not the answer; simply slapping a netbook on top of a textbook is not enough. But when districts develop a plan to pair technology with effective teaching and more efficient use of time, technology can accelerate the pace of improvement and boost student outcomes.”

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

CALLING ALL DISTRICT LEADERS: Alliance Webinar Focuses on the Need for Systemic Technology Planning to Address Higher Standards

On Thursday, November 15, the Alliance held a webinar featuring early digital learning adopters **Ryan Imbriale**, principal of Patapsco High School (MD); **Brian Lewis**, chief executive officer of the International Society for Technology in Education; and **Kecia Ray**, executive director of learning technologies for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. During the webinar, Imbriale and Ray discussed how they are using digital learning in their schools and offered advice on how school and district leaders can help with the successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards in K–12 public schools.



Alliance for Excellent Education President **Bob Wise** and Lewis also discussed the need for states and school districts to develop plans that incorporate the use of technology in school improvement efforts. They also talked about how technology can help with school improvement efforts, assessments to gauge comprehension and learning, and shrinking state and school budgets. Alliance Senior Policy Associate **Terri Duggan Schwartzbeck** served as the moderator.

State and district leaders who were unable to watch the webinar are encouraged to view the archived version at <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-nov-15-2012>.



“A SMALL PIECE OF THE STORY”: Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants Show “Positive Momentum and Progress,” New Education Department Data Reveals

While acknowledging that it is too soon to establish a clear connection between School Improvement Grants (SIG) and school performance, new data released on November 19 from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) shows “positive momentum and progress” in many schools that received funds through the SIG program.

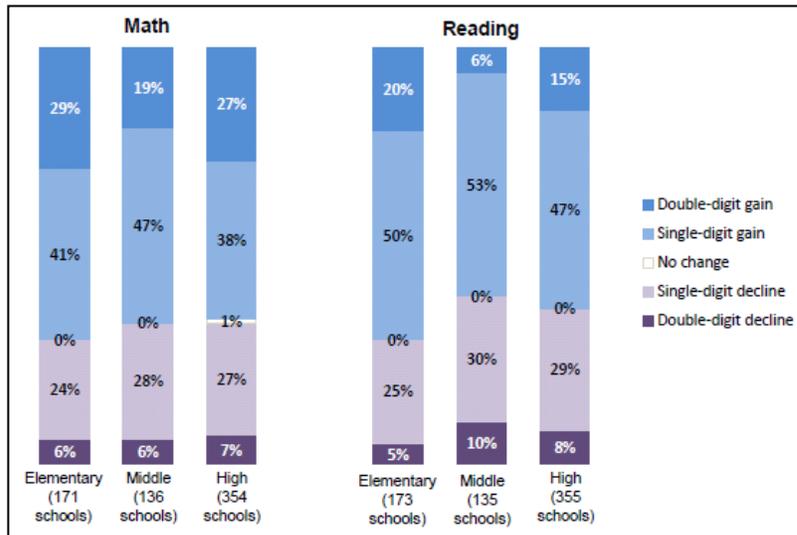
“There’s dramatic change happening in these schools, and in the long-term process of turning around the nation’s lowest-performing schools, one year of test scores only tells a small piece of the story,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “But what’s clear already is that almost without exception, schools moving in the right direction have two things in common: a dynamic principal with a clear vision for establishing a culture of high expectations and talented teachers who share that vision, with a relentless commitment to improving instruction.”

Under the Obama administration, the SIG program, which targets the nation’s lowest-performing schools, has allocated up to \$2 million per school at more than 1,300 schools, approximately 40 percent of which are high schools. The data released earlier this month provides the first overview of performance for the first group of schools after one year of implementing the SIG program. The data focuses on proficiency rate changes from School Year (SY) 2009–10 to SY 2010–11, the first year schools received SIG funds.

Based on this first year of data, 65 percent of schools made gains in math while 64 percent showed gains in reading. When broken down further, the data indicates that 25 percent of

schools made double-digit gains in math and 15 percent of schools did so in reading. On the other end of the spectrum, 34 percent of schools saw decreases in math and 37 percent experienced drops in reading. In its press release accompanying the data, ED says the decline in achievement at these schools was “not a surprising finding given the steep institutional challenges that these schools face.”

When broken down by school level, the data shows slightly larger gains in elementary schools compared to middle and high schools. Still, as shown in the graph to the right, the SIG data shows that a substantial portion of high schools implanting SIG grants saw improvements in math (65 percent) and reading (62 percent), even though high school reform can be especially challenging in comparison with improvements in elementary and middle schools.



In January, ED plans to publicly release all school-level assessment data, including state-by-state SIG assessment data, once protections to ensure privacy of students are finalized and put in place. This public file will be posted on ED’s website. ED is also collecting data on other leading indicators such as student attendance, teacher attendance, and enrollment to give a more complete picture of performance in SIG schools; it intends to publish that data early in 2013.

ED’s press release announcing the results, as well as the PowerPoint presentation that accompanied it, are available at <http://1.usa.gov/V6hKtz>.



ON SECOND THOUGHT: While Less Positive Than 2008, American Public Believes Obama Can Improve Education in Second Term

Although President Obama was unable to shepherd a rewrite of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act through the U.S. Congress during his first term, he did encourage states to enact education reforms through the Race to the Top competition and provide additional flexibility under NCLB through waivers. However, even though Obama also made investments in education one of the key prongs of his economic plan, the percentage of Americans who believe he can improve education during his second term dropped slightly—from 71 percent in 2008 to 68 percent in 2012—according to a post-election poll by *USA Today* and Gallup.

Even with the drop, improving education still ranked third in a list of thirteen different goals for the Obama administration for which Americans were most optimistic, finishing just behind bringing U.S. troops home from Afghanistan (72 percent) and improving conditions for

minorities and the poor (72 percent). Americans were pessimistic that Obama could substantially reduce the federal budget deficit (39 percent), avoid raising taxes (38 percent), control illegal immigration (36 percent), and “heal” the nation’s political divisions (33 percent).

The percentage believing that Obama could heal political divisions experienced a 21 percentage-point drop compared to a similar poll taken four years earlier. In the earlier poll, 71 percent of Americans believed Obama would improve education.

“Americans were generally more positive about the potential of the new Obama administration’s ability to accomplish most of these goals in November 2008, just after Obama was elected for the first time,” the poll notes. “This optimism no doubt reflects in part voters’ hopes for any new president and the poor economic conditions that were extant in 2008.”

Differences in voter opinion identified by the 2008 and 2012 polls are reflected in the table to the right.

“Now that President Obama has four years behind him, and with significant problems still facing the country, it is perhaps natural that Americans temper their optimism about his ability to achieve certain goals in his second term,” the poll notes. “This also may reflect the reality that economic conditions—as perceived by the public—are not as direly negative as they were in 2008, leaving the administration less room for improvement.”

	Nov 7-9, 2008	Nov 9-12, 2012	Change (pct. pts.)
	% Yes	% Yes	
Heal political divisions in this country	54	33	-21
Improve the quality of the environment	70	57	-13
Reduce unemployment	67	56	-11
Create a strong economic recovery	64	54	-10
Reduce U.S. dependence on oil	57	47	-10
Improve the healthcare system	64	55	-9
Improve conditions for minorities and the poor	80	72	-8
Improve education	71	68	-3
Substantially reduce the federal budget deficit	42	39	-3
Control illegal immigration	35	36	1
Avoid raising your taxes	36	38	2
Keep the U.S. safe from terrorism	62	65	3
Bring U.S. troops home from Afghanistan in a way that is not harmful to the U.S.	58	72	14

USA Today/Gallup, Nov. 9-12, 2012

When asked what Obama’s top priorities should be in his second term, 95 percent of Americans said it was “extremely” or “very” important that Obama take “major steps” to restore a strong economy and job market. Americans also believe that Obama should work to ensure the long-term stability of Social Security and Medicare (88 percent) and prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon (79 percent). The one education-related option from the list of twelve priorities—make college education affordable—ranked in a tie for fourth, with 73 percent of Americans saying it should be a priority.

More information on the poll is available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/158843/americans-assess-obama-accomplish-next-term.aspx>.



FOCUS ON PEOPLE: Creating a Data-Driven Culture a Necessary Step for States, Leaders, New DQC Report Finds

States have made great strides in developing and implementing data systems in their school districts. Now that the technology infrastructure is in place, states need to take action to make the information gleaned from these data systems available and actionable for state and district leaders, educators, and education stakeholders, finds a new report from the Data Quality Campaign (DQC).

The report, *Data for Action 2012: Focus on People to Change Data Culture*, makes it clear that creating a data-driven culture starts at the top: leaders and policymakers must use the technology-driven data at their disposal to influence policy and action to improve educational outcomes. For this to happen, the data must be trusted and leaders and policymakers must be courageous enough to confront the problems illuminated from the data.

“States should be commended for their hard work building robust data systems. But it’s time to focus on the people side of the data equation—how this benefits teachers and students,” said **Aimee Rogstad Guidera, executive director of the DQC**. “State policymakers must actively support a culture in which all education stakeholders are actually using and learning from this crucial information to improve student achievement—not just using data for shame and blame.”

Data structures currently implemented around the nation provide raw numbers and statistics on everything from student attendance, graduation rates, scores on standardized tests, and more. The data can be broken down into three categories: (1) longitudinal (tracking students over a period of time); (2) actionable (user friendly); and (3) contextual (comparable, within a certain context).

According to the report, raw data can help educators improve teacher effectiveness, college and career readiness, increased matriculation rates, and increased postsecondary enrollment rates. When stakeholders are given tools to understand and comprehend the data, these outcomes are consistently seen. For example, in Kentucky, by implementing data systems and creating actionable plans for educators and policymakers to interpret and utilize the data, postsecondary enrollment increased from 50.9 percent in 2004 to 61.4 percent in 2010.

Since the DQC released a set of [ten state actions to support effective data use](#) in 2011, every state has taken at least one of the actions. Delaware has implemented nine of the ten action steps and provides a tangible example of how the data is transforming educational outcomes.

According to the report, the Delaware state education agency teams up with the U.S. Department of Labor to analyze data that reveals the types of skills training the state offers. The state is then able to calculate the number of K–12 students who enroll in postsecondary institutions and the number of people who obtain jobs in the fields in which they were trained. All of this helps Delaware see whether it is meeting its goal of preparing students and citizens for the demands of the workplace.

Although there have been marked improvements, especially in the case of Delaware, it is important to note that no state has adopted all ten of DQC’s actions. Specifically, states are

lagging behind in a few key areas, such as being able to link data across state agencies, providing parents and other stakeholders with access to data obtained, and ensuring that educators know how to appropriately interpret and use the data.

The report cautions that it is not enough for states to have advanced, high-technology data structures in place. The information gleaned from them must be utilized so that policy reflects the numbers in a way that improves student outcomes. In order for states to achieve this data-driven culture, they must dedicate their leadership, policy, and resources to this effort.

“One thing is certain: we will not change the culture of education data use by focusing solely on systems or even policy,” the report states. “It is only by strengthening our focus on people and what they need that we will reach our goal of improving outcomes for the most important stakeholder: students.”

Read the full report at <http://dataqualitycampaign.org/files/DFA2012%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

“When Is Homework Worth the Time?”: New Study Finds Positive Relationship Between Homework and Standardized Test Scores, but Not Course Grades

Although it found little correlation between the amount of time tenth graders spent on homework and better course grades in math and science, a new study identifies a positive relationship between homework time and standardized test scores. The study, “When Is Homework Worth the Time?” by **Adam Maltese, assistant professor of science education in the Indiana University School of Education; Robert H. Tai, associate professor of science education at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia; and Xitao Fan, dean of education at the University of Macau**, appears in the fall 2012 issue of the *High School Journal*.

“Our results hint that maybe homework is not being used as well as it could be,” Maltese says in a press release from Indiana University. “We’re not trying to say that all homework is bad ... This is more of an argument that it should be quality over quantity. So in math, rather than doing the same types of problems over and over again, maybe it should involve having students analyze new types of problems or data. In science, maybe the students should write concept summaries instead of just reading a chapter and answering the questions at the end.”

According to the press release, the authors suggest that other factors, such as class participation and attendance, may “mitigate the association of homework to stronger grade performance.” The authors also indicate that homework assignments given may be more in line with standardized test preparation than retaining knowledge of class material.

More information is available at <http://newsinfo.iu.edu/news/page/normal/23471.html?emailID=23471>.

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>.