



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



INSEPARABLE IMPERATIVES: Unlocking Academic Potential of Students of Color Key to Future of American Economy, New Alliance Report Finds

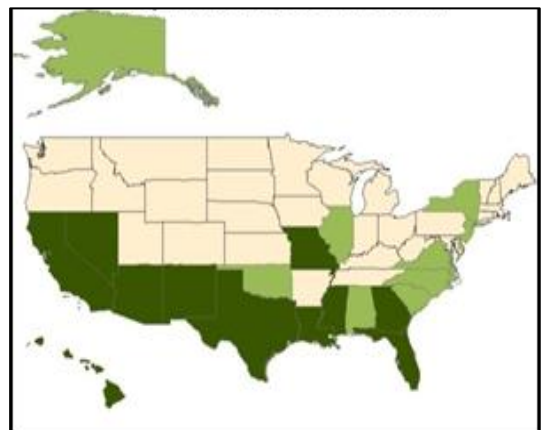
As students of color and diverse ethnicities rapidly become the leading population of public school systems in numerous states, closing educational achievement gaps and providing a quality education to all students can secure the United States's future economic prosperity, according to a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education. Noting that two-thirds of the U.S. economy is driven by consumer spending, the report, *Inseparable Imperatives: Equity in Education and the Future of the American Economy*, argues that raising individuals' education levels will boost their purchasing power and increase the national economy.

“Historically, the country’s moral failure to provide all children with an adequate and equal education did not incur a noticeable economic cost,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “This is no longer the case. Today, the moral imperative to equitably provide all students with a quality education is now a critical factor in maintaining the United States’s national economic strength.

“December is the year’s busiest shopping period,” Wise continued. “Ask any retailer whether their future depends on consumers earning a high school dropout’s \$9 per hour or the \$20 per hour of postsecondary achievement.”

As shown in the map to the right—taken from the report—students of color make up more than half of the K–12 population in twelve states (dark green) and comprise between 40 and 50 percent of the student population in an additional ten states (light green).

At the same time, however, the high school graduation rates of students of color trail those of their white peers by an average of more than 20 percentage points.



Educational disparities continue into higher education where, in 2011, 31 percent of whites age twenty-five and older held at least a bachelor’s degree compared to just 20 percent and 14 percent of blacks and Hispanics, respectively.

According to the report, individuals lacking a quality education will struggle to compete in today’s knowledge-driven economy where 60 percent of jobs require some education after high school. Based on the latest data from the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), high school dropouts

are more than three times as likely to be unemployed than are college graduates. Even when employed and at the peak of their earnings career, high school dropouts average about \$9 per hour compared to high school graduates and those with bachelor's degrees, who earn \$13 and \$25 per hour, respectively, according to an economic model developed by the Alliance for Excellent Education with the support of State Farm[®].

As the report notes, individuals earning \$9 per hour will face difficulty supporting themselves, much less a family. Making rent and car payments would be even more challenging. And a down payment and a monthly home mortgage payment—the bedrock of family and community stability—would be completely out of reach.

“Two-thirds of the U.S. economy is driven by consumer spending,” said Wise. “A dropout’s subsistence level is a tough situation for any individual and a disaster for any economy based on growing numbers of consumers living this reality,” said Wise. “To be prosperous in this century, the United States must have more than a \$9-per-hour economy. As students of color fast become the largest group of consumers, their ability to be major drivers of individual and national economic growth depends upon the quality of their education.”

For example, if every state had reached America’s Promise Alliance’s goal of graduating 90 percent of its students, many of whom are students of color, for just the Class of 2011, America would have more than 750,000 additional high school graduates. These “new graduates”—many of whom would have likely pursued postsecondary education—would earn more during their lifetimes, and in turn, they would spend more with a high school diploma than without, thus driving America’s economic productivity and growth.

Specifically, the additional graduates from just one high school class would likely earn an additional \$9 billion each year compared to their earnings without a high school diploma, the report notes. With this additional income, these students would spend more money in their communities. This increased economic activity would create a ripple effect, supporting the creation of as many as 47,000 additional new jobs and \$2 billion of increased tax revenue by the time these new graduates reach the midpoint of their careers.

Wise also noted that previous economic research by the Alliance demonstrates that raising the graduation rates for the growing numbers of African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American students would produce an increasingly significant boost for the economy. “Achieving a 90 percent graduation rate for students of color or ethnicity for just the Class of 2011,” Wise stated, “means an annual gain of as much as \$6.4 billion in increased earnings, additional spending creating as many as 34,000 new jobs, and as much as \$1.5 billion in increased tax revenues.

“As federal and state policymakers wrestle these next months with how to improve a slow economy,” Wise continued, “this report conclusively demonstrates that in this information age, achieving a successful economy is now directly linked to achieving educational equity.”

Inseparable Imperatives: Equity in Education and the Future of the American Economy is available online at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/InseparableImperatives.pdf>.

WEBINAR: Experts Discuss Equity in Education and the Future of the American Economy

On November 26, the Alliance held a webinar on its new report, *Inseparable Imperatives: Equity in Education and the Future of the American Economy*. During the webinar, panelists discussed the nation's shifting demographics and the moral and economic rationale for providing all students—especially students of color and Native students—with a quality education.

The webinar featured **Rufina Hernandez**, executive director of the Campaign for High School Equity; **Bob Jones**, president and founder of Education & Workforce Policy, LLC, and Alliance President **Bob Wise**.



Archived video from the webinar is available at <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-nov-26-2012>.



CATCHING UP TO COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS: Performance Gaps Difficult to Close But Not Impossible, New Report Finds

Narrowing performance gaps for low-income students and students of color requires prevention interventions over remediation, a new report from ACT finds. The report, *Catching Up to College and Career Readiness*, argues it is essential for educators and policymakers to understand the difficulty of preventing and closing gaps to design effective interventions.

“Underestimating the time and effort required [to close gaps] could lead educators and policymakers to underfund prevention efforts and choose intervention strategies that are too little and too late,” the report notes. “Underestimating the difficulty could also lead policymakers to hold schools to unrealistic accountability targets, creating strong incentives at various levels in the system to lower standards and artificially inflate test scores. On the other hand, overestimating the difficulty could lead educators and policymakers to give up on students.”

In an effort to determine at what point in a student's education he or she is most able to catch up to grade-level standards, the ACT team analyzes test scores of students between fourth and eighth grade and those between eighth and twelfth grade.

In the report, ACT analyzes the results of 800,000 eighth graders' performance on the standardized test EXPLORE. They determined that one-fourth of the eighth graders were “far off track,” or more than one standard deviation behind their peers in reading and mathematics. As shown in the table below, these percentages were dramatically higher for students of color. Among African Americans and Hispanics, 43 percent and 42 percent, respectively, were far off track in reading; 50 percent and 41 percent were far off track in math; and 74 and 67 percent were far off track in science.

Student Academic Preparation	Reading			Mathematics			Science		
	All Students	African American Students	Hispanic Students	All Students	African American Students	Hispanic Students	All Students	African American Students	Hispanic Students
On Track <i>Met or exceeded College Readiness Benchmark</i>	43%	24%	26%	37%	15%	21%	16%	4%	7%
Off Track <i>No more than one standard deviation below Benchmark</i>	30%	33%	32%	35%	35%	37%	32%	21%	26%
Far Off Track <i>More than one standard deviation below Benchmark</i>	27%	43%	42%	28%	50%	41%	52%	74%	67%

To gauge how well high schools were catching up students who were far behind, ACT compared eighth-grade scores to a sample of 391,000 twelfth graders who completed college-readiness benchmarks. Results show that only 10 percent of the eighth-graders who had been far off track were caught up by twelfth grade.

“Waiting until high school to address preparation gaps is too late for the majority of students who have fallen behind, particularly those who are far off track,” the report notes. “Catching up those students is a daunting challenge even for the most effective high schools.”

ACT also studied how well fourth graders who were far off track could be caught up by eighth grade. It compared 38,000 fourth-graders’ results on a standardized test in one state (Arkansas) to the same students’ eighth-grade results. Of the 20 percent of fourth-grade students who were far off track in reading and mathematics, only 9 percent of them had caught up and were on track in reading; 10 percent were considered on track in math.

In both comparisons, higher-achieving schools and lower-poverty schools had slightly better numbers in remediating students who were far behind.

The report offers four recommendations to educators and policymakers:

- Monitor student progress early to identify students who are off track and ensure that they receive needed interventions.
- Emphasize approaches likely to have a broad positive effect on the entire student population.
- Evaluate programs for middle and high school students based on the programs’ effectiveness with students with different initial levels of academic preparation.
- Set reasonable growth goals based on student performance in more successful schools and ensure that goals for percentages of students reaching college and career readiness take into account the students’ starting points and the number of years the school has available to catch them up.

Read the full report at <http://media.act.org/documents/CatchingUpToCCR.pdf>.

U.S. Department of Education Releases State-By-State High School Graduation Rates

On November 26, the U.S. Department of Education released four-year high school graduation rates for the Class of 2011 in forty-seven states¹ and the District of Columbia, revealing large graduation gaps between white students and students of color, as well as other student subgroups. The report marks the first time that states used a common, rigorous measure to determine high school graduation rates.

“By using this new measure, states will be more honest in holding schools accountable and ensuring that students succeed,” said **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. “Ultimately, these data will help states target support to ensure more students graduate on time, college and career ready.”

Iowa reported the highest overall graduation rate (88 percent), followed by Vermont (87 percent) and Wisconsin (87 percent). At the other end of the scale, the District of Columbia (59 percent), Nevada (62 percent), New Mexico (63 percent) reported the lowest graduation rates. Only two states (Iowa and Kansas) reported graduation rates at 70 percent or higher for each of the eleven student subgroups represented in the report.² But even the highest-performing states have significant graduation gaps among different student subgroups. For example, Wisconsin reported a 91 percent graduation rate for white students, compared to a 64 percent graduation rate for black students.

According to the [press release](#) from the U.S. Department of Education that accompanied the report, the varying methods formerly used by states to report graduation rates made comparisons between states unreliable, while the new, common metric can be used by states, districts, and schools to promote greater accountability and to develop strategies that will reduce dropout rates and increase high school graduation rates in schools nationwide.



A SYSTEM IN NEED OF REPAIR: Federal Student Financial Aid System Must Be Changed to Focus on Completion, Not Access, Says New Alliance Report

A new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education outlines serious problems with the current federal student financial aid system and calls on policymakers to simplify both the process and the programs and shift the system’s emphasis from simply access to providing the overall support resulting in postsecondary degree completion.

“In working to ensure that all high school students graduate ready for college and careers, the Alliance believes all students need a proper financial aid foundation to build upon their high school experiences,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “But if the federal student aid system continues to focus only on increased postsecondary access and not on completion, individuals and the country as a whole will bear economic and social impacts.”

The report, *A System in Need of Repair: An Examination of Federal Student Aid for Postsecondary Education*, provides a brief overview of legislative changes that have altered the structure and focus of the system and turned them into a complicated web of Pell Grants, federal student loans, tuition tax credits, and campus-based aid programs that is unnecessarily convoluted and daunting for parents and students to navigate.

The system—intended to increase access to higher education for students who would otherwise be unable to attend—has instead become a significant barrier for many. According to the report, 750,000 students submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in 2009 to

¹ Data for Idaho, Kentucky, and Oklahoma was not included in the report.

² Student subgroups represented in the report are American/Indian/Alaska Native or Native American; Asian/Pacific Islander; black (not Hispanic) or African American; Hispanic/Latino; multicultural or multiethnic or multiracial; white (not Hispanic) or Caucasian; children with disabilities; limited English proficient students; economically disadvantaged students; Asian; and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander or Pacific Islander.

receive financial aid, but had it returned for insufficient data and then failed to resubmit it. The report notes that the process should be simplified and streamlined to ensure students—particularly low-income and first-generation college-goers—are not barred from access to higher education.

Failing to fix the financial aid system will have significant repercussions for the nation’s economy. As the report notes, the United States is projected to need 22 million new workers with college degrees by 2018, but it is projected to miss that mark by more than 3 million. Conversely, helping more students attain postsecondary degrees will ensure that they fare better in tough economic times and contribute more to the economy in both tax revenue and purchases.

A System in Need of Repair recommends simplifying the federal student financial aid process and providing clearer information to parents and students earlier in the K–12 system. It identifies problems with how federal policymakers have addressed student aid in the past, including a failure to emphasize completion and a shortsighted fragmented approach that made incremental changes to individual programs. Instead, the report encourages policymakers to think holistically about how all of the pieces of the student aid system could combine to become larger than the sum of their parts.

“The federal student aid system can and must work better,” Wise said. “Americans must demand a system that offers returns on the national investment in higher education and gives incentives and assistance to help students to complete postsecondary degrees.”

In January 2013, the Alliance will release a related report that will include detailed recommendations for reforming the federal student aid system to significantly increase the rates at which students enroll in and complete postsecondary programs. The current report, *A System in Need of Repair: An Examination of Federal Student Aid for Postsecondary Education*, is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/SystemInNeedOfRepair.pdf>.



COUNTDOWN TO DLD 2013: Join the Wave of Innovation and Sign Up for Digital Learning Day 2013

On February 6, 2013, the Alliance will hold the second annual Digital Learning Day culminating in a national event webcast live from the Newseum in Washington, DC that will feature premier guests, speakers, and teachers from around the country, as well as state-of-the-art learning resources and tools.

The upcoming 2013 event builds upon the events of February 1, 2012, when thirty-nine states, 17,000 teachers, and nearly 2 million students participated in the first-ever Digital Learning Day, a national campaign spearheaded by the Alliance for Excellent Education that celebrates teachers and shines a spotlight on successful instructional practice and effective use of technology in classrooms across the country.

“It’s not just about technology, it’s about using technology effectively to help teachers improve learning outcomes for students,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Digital Learning Day will demonstrate how great teaching and great instructional innovation, when combined with the effective use of technology, can help personalize and improve learning for every student.”

Participation in Digital Learning Day is free, easy, and open to all interested educators, parents, and students in and out of school. Registered participants will receive exclusive information including interactive lessons that teachers can use on Digital Learning Day and tips on how to incorporate digital tools into daily instruction. To register to participate in Digital Learning Day and learn more about how digital learning is already being used in schools around the country, visit <http://www.DigitalLearningDay.org>.

Five States To Reimagine the School Day, Increase Classroom Time by 300 Hours

Five states—Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Tennessee—will participate in a pilot initiative to extend teaching time by 300 hours over the school year under a \$3 million collaborative with the Ford Foundation and the National Center on Time and Learning. Dubbed the Time for Innovative Matters in Education (TIME) collaborative, the effort will give select public schools in the five participating states the time, funds, and opportunity to re-envision a school day that meets the needs of twenty-first-century students, parents, and communities.

“This is not just about adding time and doing more of the same,” said **Luis Ubinas, president of the Ford Foundation**. “It’s about creating a learning day that suits the needs of our children, the realities of working parents, and the commitment of our teachers. It’s a total school makeover.”

The extended hours are intended to allow for more personalized teaching that ensures no students are left behind. Participating schools will have the freedom to design their programs in ways that suit the needs of their students and staff, including increasing collaboration among teachers; providing increased opportunities in the arts; and generally promoting a culture of higher achievement. Schools are required to engage in a year-long planning process that will involve community members, parents, and local businesses to maximize the potential of TIME.

The goals of the collaborative are profound: narrow and close achievement gaps and prepare students for the twenty-first-century global workplace, in which they will need skills that go beyond textbooks, including technology aptitude, cultural intelligence, and complex problem-solving skills. Participating in the effort are nearly 20,000 students across these eleven school districts: Denver, Boulder Valley, Jefferson County, and Adams 50 in Colorado; East Hartford, Meriden, and New London in Connecticut; Fall River and Lawrence in Massachusetts; Rochester, New York; and Achievement School District (Memphis) and Metro Nashville in Tennessee. Learn more about TIME at <http://www.timeandlearning.org/time-collaborative>.



Happy Holidays from the Alliance for Excellent Education!

The Alliance for Excellent Education wishes you and yours a happy holiday season and best wishes for the new year!

This is the last issue before the Alliance newsletter—although not the Alliance staff—settles in for a short winter’s nap. The next issue of *Straight A’s* will be January 14, 2013. In the meantime, follow the Alliance on [Twitter](#), like the Alliance on [Facebook](#), and visit the Alliance’s “[High School Soup](#)” blog for the latest education news and events.

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>.