



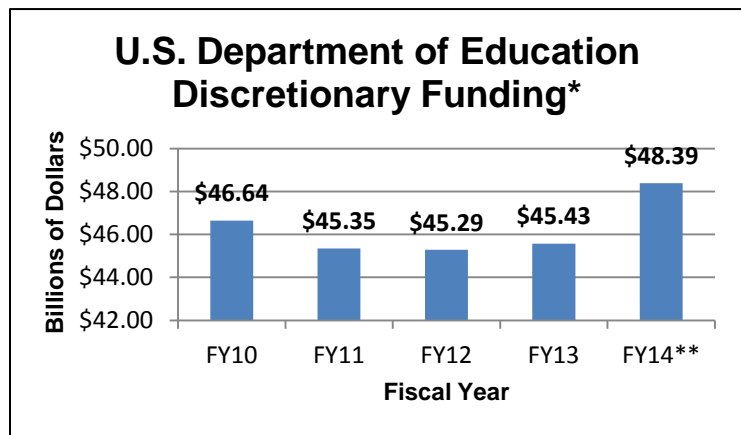
Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



OBAMA RELEASES FY 2014 BUDGET PROPOSAL: Budget Would Fund New High School Redesign Competition and Preschool Program for Low-Income Four-Year-Olds

Released April 10, President Obama's education budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 proposes new grant competitions focused on high school redesign and college completion and includes a \$75 billion plan to provide access to high-quality preschool programs. Overall, the budget would provide \$48.39 billion in discretionary funding—excluding Pell Grants—for the U.S. Department of Education, an increase of \$2.8 billion over last year.



*Excludes Pell Grants

**President Obama's proposed budget

“We must continue to build on the reforms already transforming classrooms across the country,” [said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#). “Strategic investments in our educational system will not only provide more opportunities for millions of Americans, but they will strengthen our nation’s workforce as well.”

The centerpiece of the president’s budget proposal is a ten-year, \$75 billion program that would provide universal access to high-quality preschool for all four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families and create an incentive for states to serve additional middle-class children. Called “Preschool for All,” the program would function as a federal-state partnership in which the federal government would assume a significant share of the program’s costs in its first years with states gradually assuming more responsibility over time. Obama would pay for the program through a 94-per-pack increase in taxes on cigarettes.

“Providing a year of free, public preschool education for 4-year-old children is an important investment in our future,” Obama [wrote in his budget message](#). “It will give all our kids the best start in life, helping them perform better in elementary school and ultimately helping them, and the country, be better prepared for the demands of the global economy. Not only that, it could save hard-working families thousands of dollars each year in child care costs. This is an investment we need to make, and it is fully paid for in this budget by imposing a new tax on every pack of cigarettes sold.”

The president's budget also includes a \$300 million high school redesign program that would "help redesign America's high schools to prepare students with the real-world skills they need to find a job right away or go to college." Specifically, the program would support competitive grants to school districts that partner with institutions of higher education (IHEs) and employers, including businesses and nonprofit and community-based organizations. It would give priority to partnerships in areas with limited access to quality college and career opportunities, such as high-poverty or rural school districts.

Projects supported under the program would (1) engage students in personalized learning opportunities tied to real-world experiences; (2) provide students with rigorous, challenging academic content aligned with college-level expectations, including programs that offer students access to college-level course work and opportunities to gain postsecondary credit while still in high school; (3) help students learn academic content plus career-related competencies, employability, and technical skills; and (4) offer meaningful college and career exploration opportunities and high-quality advisory services.

"Education must be relevant to employers and engaging for students," [said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia.](#) "The president's high school redesign proposal will accomplish both by promoting partnerships between school districts and employers to align high school expectations with the demands of college and the workforce. Equally significant, the proposal highlights the importance of personalization and work-based learning. Giving students the opportunity to apply what they learn in the classroom to the real world will increase student engagement and graduation rates."

The president's budget also proposes a new \$1 billion Race to the Top program to encourage states to improve college affordability, access, completion, and quality. The request would allow the U.S. Department of Education to fund up to ten states that commit to reforms in areas such as (1) sustaining fiscal support for higher education while modernizing funding policies to constrain costs and improve outcomes; (2) removing barriers that prevent the creation of innovative methods of student learning and new degree pathways; (3) empowering consumer choice through increased transparency; and (4) smoothing transitions into college and between IHEs.

"Skyrocketing costs are still pricing too many young people out of a higher education, or saddling them with unsustainable debt," Obama wrote. "And taxpayers cannot continue to subsidize higher and higher costs for higher education. To encourage colleges to do their part to keep costs down, the budget includes reforms that will ensure affordability and value are considered in determining which colleges receive certain types of federal aid."

Among existing programs, the president's budget proposes a \$125 million increase for school turnaround grants, currently known as School Improvement Grants (SIGs). The increase would be used to fund a new competitive grant program to build school districts' capacity to support turnaround efforts and sustain improvements in schools that have received SIG funds. Up to \$25 million of the funds could be used to expand the School Turnaround AmeriCorps, which uses AmeriCorps volunteers to build local capacity to implement effective school turnarounds.

The president's budget also proposes a \$66 million increase for the Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund, a competitive program that helps to improve educational outcomes for students by

developing, validating, and scaling up effective practices. An additional proposal is a \$265 million increase for a variety of programs focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education, such as a new STEM Master Teacher Corps that would recruit, train, and place recent college graduates and mid-career professionals in the STEM fields in high-need schools.

The Promise Neighborhoods program would receive a \$240 million increase under the president's proposed budget as part of his "Ladders of Opportunity" initiative, which funds comprehensive, neighborhood-based plans for meeting the cradle-to-career educational, health, and social service needs of children in high-poverty communities.

Statewide Data Systems would receive \$85 million, a \$46.9 million increase over last year. Of the increase, \$36 million would go toward new grants focused on early childhood data while \$10 million would focus on postsecondary data initiatives designed to improve information on students as they progress from high school to postsecondary education and the workforce.

Among other education programs, Title I would receive \$14.52 billion, the same amount received in FY13 and FY12. Special education would receive \$11.58 billion, again the same amount received in FY13 and FY12. The budget also proposes to consolidate some existing programs, including Elementary and Secondary School Counseling, which received \$52.3 million last year, the High School Graduation Initiative (\$48.8 million), and Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program (\$159.7 million).

By consolidating programs, the president hopes to continue support for some of the eliminated activities while reducing duplication and improving program management. Programs slated for consolidation, however, have sometimes been eliminated by Republicans looking to reduce spending. For example, President Obama's FY 2012 budget proposed \$383 million for a consolidated literacy program that included Even Start (\$66 million), Literacy Through School Libraries (\$19 million), National Writing Project (\$25 million), and Reading Is Fundamental (\$25 million); all were eliminated as part of deficit reduction efforts. In this year's budget, Obama proposes to combine Striving Readers and Ready-to-Learn Television—which received \$27 million last year—into a single \$187 million competitive program to improve literacy instruction, especially in high-need schools, for children from preschool through grade 12. Already, several members of Congress have sent a letter to the House Appropriations Committee asking to maintain funding for the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program.

As it has done in past years, Obama's budget is likely to draw attention from federal lawmakers concerned that the president's budget invests too much into competitive programs at the expense of formula programs like Title I that flow equally to states.

"Budgets are aspirations; appropriations are implementation," said Wise. "The real challenge will be matching appropriations to aspirations."

A table containing program-by-program funding levels as proposed in President Obama's budget is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget14/14pbapt.pdf>.



DUNCAN TALKS EDUCATION BUDGET: In Congressional Testimony, Duncan Defends Obama’s Budget, Urges Committee Members to Look at Big Picture in Competitive Versus Formula Debate

Appearing before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), Education, and Related Agencies on April 17, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** heard support for the president’s preschool proposal from committee members of both parties, but he also faced pointed questions regarding President Obama’s decision to target new spending on competitive programs rather than formula programs, such as Title I and special education.



Calling the president’s budget a “good starting point,” **Senate Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)** said he was pleased by the president’s proposal to turn around the nation’s lowest-performing schools, extend the school day and school year, and make college more affordable, but he was concerned by the lack of new funding for Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which funds special education.

“I would have liked to see a higher priority on Title I and IDEA Part B state grants,” Harkin said. “These are the two cornerstones of federal support for public education, but basically flat-funded in the president’s budget. And I would have hoped that in the \$3.2 billion increase that the president asked for that we would have had some more money directed to Title I and IDEA. But overall, I believe the budget shows that the president understands the importance of education to our nation’s future.”

Following Harkin, **Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS), top Republican on the subcommittee**, also discussed Obama’s proposed \$75 billion preschool program, saying that he “certainly [does not] dispute that access to those learning experiences is critical for young children,” but he noted that only a few states have benefitted from the administration’s Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge Program. Moran added that he was concerned that the president’s budget “signals a weakening of the federal commitment to formula grant programs that are the primary source of federal education.”

“Instead of increasing funding for the key K–12 programs above the fiscal year ‘12 levels or even continuing support for past Race to the Top competitions, the administration shows to fund a new unauthorized \$1 billion program called Race to the Top–College Affordability,” Moran said. “This new competition would be the fourth component of Race to the Top, which to date has yet to demonstrate proven results that can be replicated and sustainable once funding is exhausted.”

In response to questions about competitive versus formula, Duncan referred to increases for School Improvement Grants and Promise Neighborhoods, noting that both of these programs serve students who receive funds from Title I and IDEA. He urged committee members to “look

not just at one funding line but to look across funding lines,” adding, “if you look at one line item, I think you sort of missed the comprehensive nature of what we’re trying to do.”

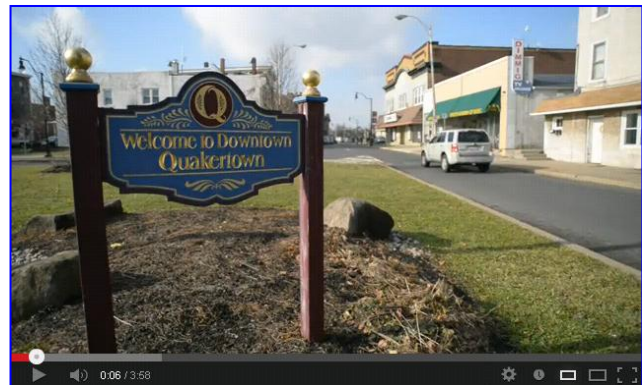
Video of the hearing is available at <http://1.usa.gov/11BUzF9>.

Duncan’s complete testimony is available at <http://1.usa.gov/ZeZoHw>.



BLAZING A TRAIL: Quakertown Community School District Blends Online Learning with Traditional Classroom Instruction to Boost Student Outcomes, New Alliance Profile Reveals

Located about forty-five miles north of Philadelphia, PA, Quakertown Community School District (QCSD) has seen tremendous improvement in student achievement and engagement from implementation of a blended learning approach that combines online learning with traditional classroom instruction, finds a new interactive video profile conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education and Public Impact. “Quakertown Community School District: A Systematic Approach to Blended Learning That Focuses on District Leadership, Staffing, and Cost-effectiveness,” is the first in a series of interactive video profiles highlighting innovative school districts that utilize digital learning to improve teaching and learning. (Click on the image above to watch an [introductory video](#) on how QCSD worked with important partners, including its local teachers’ union, to improve student outcomes using effective applications of technology and blended learning strategies.)



“Quakertown is a role model and leader among school districts for its innovative use of digital learning to improve student engagement and achievement. They have blazed a trail for other school districts to transform learning with the smart use of technology,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia.**

QCSD, a small, rural, K–12 school district, has seen gains in student improvement since its blended learning program’s implementation in 2008. From 2011–12 alone, the graduation rate in the district increased from 88 percent to 95 percent. The interactive video profile, which includes interviews with district teachers and administrators, notes that at the core of the program’s success is flexible, personalized learning that fits every student’s needs. Quakertown’s success is documented as part of the Alliance’s “[Project 24](#)” to show the importance of districts preparing a comprehensive plan detailing how to incorporate technology to boost learning outcomes.

In QCSD’s blended learning approach, students can take classes online, in a more traditional classroom setting, or choose a mixture of both, the profile explains. The emphasis on online learning and integrated technology into every student’s education aligns with QCSD’s mission: “to create and support the conditions necessary to effectively leverage technology for learning.”

Currently, the district offers eighty unique combined classes at the middle school and high school levels.

To advance their mission, the QCSD took several major steps. First, the district created the K–12 Cyber School, in which students can opt to take online classes. Next, the district employed a ninth-grade one-to-one laptop initiative that seeks to equip every student with the technology necessary to learn anytime, anywhere. Next, the district implemented a “bring your own device” (BYOD) policy that encourages students to bring iPads, iPhones, and other forms of technology into their classrooms to enhance and further personalize the learning experience. Finally, schools in the district have integrated digital learning into traditional classrooms.

“As a superintendent I think one of my goals might be to never have to call a snow day because learning needs to take place at all times,” **QCSD Superintendent Lisa Andrejko** says in the video to the right, which is embedded in the case study. “So some of our efforts have been looking at technology to be always available for students whether they’re sitting in a classroom, or whether they’re on their iPhone, or whether they’re at Grandma’s house, or if they’re at home on a snow day.”



QCSD values its teachers and, as the interactive video profile notes, places them at the core of the district’s success. Teachers experience individualized and flexible professional development days, during which they can choose areas of focus. Teachers also experience flexible scheduling that complements teaching online courses. Additional support staff members dedicated to technology and monitoring students’ progress in online courses eases demands on teachers, as well.

“We are excited to highlight Quakertown’s innovative use of blended learning to increase student achievement,” said **Bryan C. Hassel, codirector of Public Impact**. “We hope the case study’s detailed focus on QCSD’s approach to staffing and budget will help other districts think creatively about redesigning school models and integrating digital learning to reach more students with excellent teaching.”

QCSD’s blended learning program works in large part because of the district’s emphasis on partnering with the local teachers union and businesses. For example, the district works with Comcast to provide discounted internet connectivity to students’ families that qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

“We’re in our fourth year now, but four years ago we decided, ‘Let’s give cyber learning a shot.’ And I hate to use the analogy because it’s overused, but we really did build the plane while flying it. And we jumped in with two feet first and said, ‘Let’s do this. Let’s learn as we go. We can’t do it wrong. We can always do it and then change it as we do it, but we can’t really make a huge mistake,’” Andrejko said.

In the coming weeks, the Alliance will release additional interactive case studies on other leading school districts in digital learning implementation, including Cajon Valley Union School District in California, Dysart Unified School District in Arizona, and Mooresville Graded School District in North Carolina.

The complete case study is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Quakertown.pdf>.

ALMOST HEAVEN: West Virginia Becomes First State to Implement “Project 24” as Part of Statewide Education Initiative

On April 17, West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin (D) joined with Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, to announce that West Virginia would be the first state to implement “[Project 24](#)” as part of a statewide education initiative.



Led by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Project 24 is a ground-breaking new initiative to help school districts plan for and effectively use technology and digital learning to ensure that students graduate from high school ready for college and a career. As part of the statewide effort, particular focus will be on helping all West Virginia school districts to undergo districtwide planning through Project 24.

“With today’s technological advances, we have the ability to personalize learning and better meet the needs of each individual student,” [Tomblin said](#). “I believe Project 24 will help us integrate technology and digital learning into our classrooms by providing innovative ways for our children to learn, in turn helping prepare them for a successful future.”

At the state level, West Virginia will complete a review of classroom technology and digital learning infrastructure in the state. It will also encourage all school districts in West Virginia to complete the Project 24 self assessment, providing valuable feedback from the districts that will help the state frame its vision for student learning, recognize aspects of the education system that need to be addressed, and specify how technology can help align these efforts to college- and career-ready standards. The review will be followed by a plan of action and details on how to implement the plan to personalize learning for all of West Virginia’s students. West Virginia’s commitment to Project 24 comes on the heels of the West Virginia Legislature passing significant education reforms to increase student achievement and improve the state’s education system.

“Governor Tomblin and the legislature have just enacted strong education legislation,” said Wise. “Developing a comprehensive plan for how technology can support teachers and students is an important first step in reaching the important goals that West Virginia has adopted. While hundreds of school districts across the nation are involved with Project 24, Governor Tomblin leads the nation in making it a statewide effort.”

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a free 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 education 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 www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).