



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



ESEA UPDATE: House Committee Passes NCLB Rewrite, Reconciliation with Senate Bill Could Prove Difficult

During the month of June, congressional committees in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that would rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Action began on June 12, when the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) [passed the Strengthening America's Schools Act \(SASA\)](#). Action in the House followed on June 19 when the House Education and the Workforce Committee passed the Student Success Act. Each bill passed its respective committee on partisan votes.

Unlike its Senate counterpart, the House bill intentionally limits the role of the federal government, preferring to, in its words, “put more control in the hands of state and local leaders” while working to “reduce the federal footprint in the nation’s classrooms, support more effective teachers, and empower parents.”

“For too long, politics have stood in the way of real education reform,” [said House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline \(R-MN\)](#). “Continuing to allow short-term fixes and temporary waivers to take the place of a better law is inexcusable; Congress has a responsibility to move this process forward. The Student Success Act delivers the long-term solutions parents, teachers, and education leaders want and children deserve. The committee took an important step today by approving this responsible legislation, and I look forward to a lively debate on the House floor in the coming weeks.”

The Student Success Act would eliminate the requirement for schools and students to make “Adequate Yearly Progress,” instead deferring to states and school districts on how much—if any—progress schools and students would need to make. The bill would also eliminate federally mandated actions and interventions currently required of poorly performing schools. It would repeal the federal “highly qualified teacher” requirements and direct states and school districts to develop teacher evaluation systems—based on multiple measures and feedback from parents, teachers, school leaders, and other school staff—that measure an educator’s influence on student learning.

The House committee’s bill would continue NCLB’s requirement that states and school districts issue and distribute annual report cards, including disaggregated data on student achievement and high school graduation rates, but it would eliminate more than seventy existing elementary and secondary education programs. Several existing K–12 education programs would be consolidated into a new Local Academic Flexible Grant that would direct federal money to states and school districts without instructions on how it should be spent.

Democrats on the House Education and the Workforce Committee had a different opinion on the bill, saying that it “walks away from the broad national consensus that schools must prepare students to graduate college and career ready.” They added that the bill fails to hold states, districts, and schools accountable for supporting and improving the achievement of all students.

“The Republican bill places politics before students,” [said Representative George Miller \(D-CA\), top Democrat on the House committee.](#) “The country needs a rewrite of No Child Left Behind. But Republicans have passed an extreme bill that will never be signed by the president, ensuring that this broken law will remain in place.”

In a [statement](#), **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, said the House’s Student Success Act is “heavy on the federal government identifying problems but light on remedies.” Wise prefers the approach taken in the Senate bill, which he said “asserts an appropriate federal role for education policy—one that is supportive and flexible while preserving the protections for underserved students that have been the hallmark of federal education policy since ESEA was first signed into law in 1965.”

The future of both bills is unclear. **Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA)** said that he would like to bring SASA up for a vote on the Senate floor, but he could face difficulty finding the Republican support necessary for the bill to pass the full Senate, especially because it did not receive any Republican support when voted out of the Senate HELP Committee. In the House, where a vote on the Student Success Act could occur before the end of the summer, House Republicans could pass an NCLB rewrite without Democratic support, but whatever the House passes will need to be reconciled with the Senate’s vastly different version.

“Action by both House and Senate education committees provides the first light at the end of the very long ESEA tunnel,” Wise said, “but can a bipartisan train straddle very different sets of partisan tracks and make it to the president’s desk?”

Video of the House committee’s consideration of the Student Success Act is available at [http://edworkforce.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=338931.](http://edworkforce.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=338931)



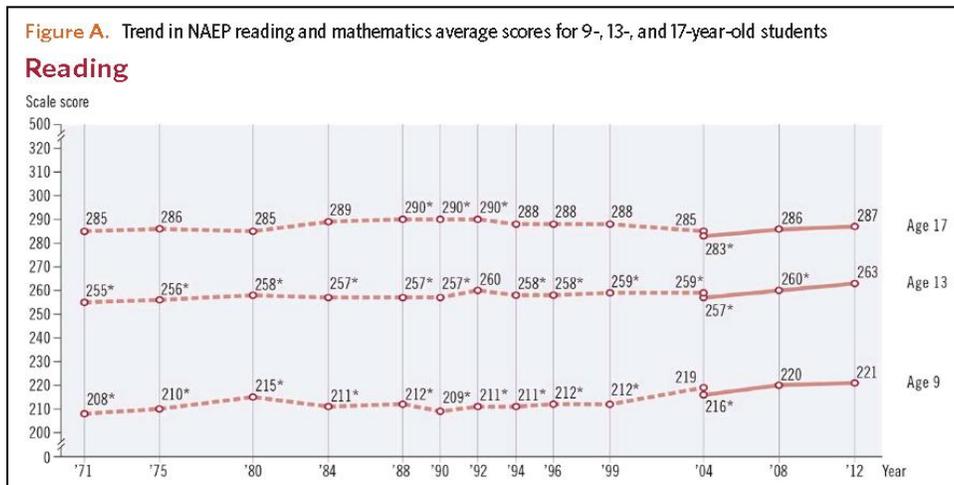
LONG-TERM TRENDS: Latest NAEP Results Show No Overall Progress in Reading and Math for the Nation’s Seventeen-Year-Olds Since 1970s, But Achievement Gap Narrows

Released on June 27, results from the 2012 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) long-term trend assessments in reading and mathematics show significant gains for nine- and thirteen-year-olds since testing began in the early 1970s but no changes for the nation’s seventeen-year-olds. One positive long-term trend is a shrinking of achievement gaps between white students and their black and Hispanic peers.

“I am pleased to see some significant progress over the decades to narrow the achievement gaps. There are considerable bright spots, including remarkable improvement among black and Hispanic students and great strides for girls in mathematics,” [said David Driscoll, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board,](#) which oversees the administration of NAEP assessments. “Assessing students at particular ages over the decades provides a unique

perspective on learning and achievement and a way to take a step back to see overall achievement trends and just how far we've come.”

In some areas, however, the long-term progress is not as positive. Consider the performance of the nation's seventeen-year-olds, who posted an average score of 285 in reading in 1971, as shown in the graph below. In 2012, their average score was 287, a two-point increase that the report said was “not significantly different” from the 1971 score. According to the report, individuals with a reading score at that level can search for specific information, interrelate ideas, and make generalizations, but they likely struggle to find, understand, summarize, and explain relatively complicated literary and informational passages.



The improving pattern held in mathematics, with average scores of nine-year-olds increasing from 219 in 1973 to 244 in 2012 and those of thirteen-year-olds from 266 to 285. The average score of seventeen-year-olds, however, only increased by 2 points, from 304 to 306, a difference again deemed not significant.

Although the average score for all seventeen-year-olds did not improve, the average scores for black and Hispanic seventeen-year-olds improved significantly since 1971, narrowing the achievement gap between them and their white counterparts. In 1971, the white-black achievement gap was 53 points; in 2012, it had narrowed to 26. The white-Hispanic achievement gap narrowed from 41 points in 1975 to 21 points in 2012. Much of this progress, however, occurred between the 1970s and the late 1980s. Since 1990, little, if any, progress has been made. In fact, the white-black achievement gap actually *increased* from 20 points in 1988 to 26 points in 2012.

“Today’s results are the nation’s education electrocardiogram and show positive outcomes for the early grades and increased performance by students of color, but the nation’s high school students are in desperate need of serious attention,” [said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia](#). “Today’s economic trends show the rapidly growing need for college- and career-ready students; these results show that many of the nation’s seventeen-year-olds are career ready, but only if you’re talking about jobs from the 1970s.”

The complete report is available at <http://1.usa.gov/1b07RD3>.



EDUCATION AT A GLANCE: U.S. High School Dropouts “Hit Hardest” by the Economic Recession, New OECD Report Finds

Released on June 27 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance 2013* includes data showing how the United States ranks internationally in several key areas, including high school graduation rates, the percentage of individuals with a college degree, early education enrollment rates, teacher salaries, and more. This year’s edition also offers a snapshot showing how individuals with different levels of education fared during the worst economic crisis seen in decades.

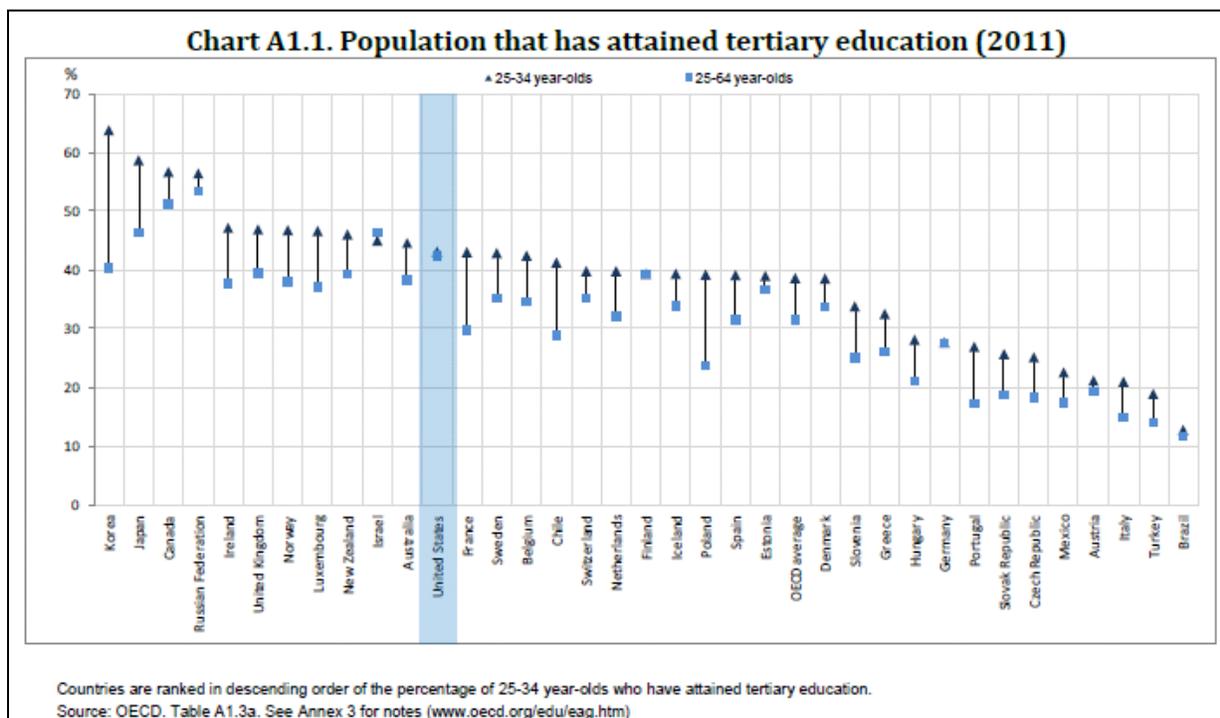
According to the report, unemployment rates for individuals without an upper secondary education (an average of 13 percent across OECD countries) are nearly three times higher than those of individuals who have a tertiary education (i.e., postsecondary education) (5 percent). In the United States, people without an upper secondary education (i.e., high school degree) were “hit hardest” by the recession, the report notes. Between 2008 and 2011, the unemployment rate for individuals without an upper secondary education increased by more than 6 percentage points, reaching a high of 16.2 percent in 2011. Across OECD countries, the unemployment rate increased by slightly less than 4 percentage points to 12.6 percent during the same time period.

Among U.S. adults with a tertiary degree, the unemployment rate increased by only 2.5 percentage points to 4.9 percent. Across OECD countries, the equivalent were an increase of 1.5 percentage points to 4.8 percent.

Individuals in the United States with a tertiary education also command an earnings premium—among the highest in the world—over their counterparts with only an upper secondary education. In 2000, tertiary-educated individuals aged twenty-five to sixty-four earned 76 percent more than their counterparts with an upper secondary education. In 2011, the earnings premium had increased to 77 percent in the United States, compared to the OECD average of 64 percent. “The relative earnings premium for those with a tertiary education increased in most OECD countries over the past ten years, indicating that the demand for more educated individuals still exceeds supply,” the report notes.

“Leaving school with good qualifications is more essential than ever,” said **OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría**. “Countries must focus efforts on helping young people, especially the less well-educated who are most at risk of being trapped in a low-skills, low-wage future. Priorities include reducing school dropout rates and investing in skills-oriented education that integrates the worlds of learning and work. Though the focus should remain on quality of spending, governments must ensure that investment in education does not fall as a result of the crisis.”

In 2011, approximately 42 percent of American adults aged twenty-five to sixty-four had a tertiary degree, ranking the United States fifth behind Canada (51 percent), Israel (46 percent), Japan (46 percent), and the Russian Federation (53 percent), according to the *Education at a Glance 2013*, released on June 27 by the OECD. Among young adults aged twenty-five to thirty-four, however, the United States (43 percent) ranks twelfth out of the thirty-seven nations included in the report, as shown in the graph below.



The same trend is present with upper secondary education. When ranked by the percentage of individuals aged twenty-five to sixty-four with at least an upper secondary education, the United States (89 percent) ranks in a tie for third with Canada, Estonia, and Poland, trailing only the Czech Republic (92 percent) and the Slovak Republic (91 percent). But, as shown in the table to the right, the United States (89 percent) ranks in a tie for tenth when the same measure is applied to individuals aged twenty-five to thirty-four.

Percentage of 25–34-Year Olds with an Upper Secondary Education	
Country	Percentage
Korea	98%
Czech Republic	94%
Poland	94%
Slovak Republic	94%
Slovenia	94%
Canada	92%
Sweden	91%
Finland	90%
Israel	90%
Switzerland	89%
United States	89%

At both the tertiary and upper secondary levels, the lower rankings for younger individuals are not because the U.S. performance has slipped; it is because other countries have passed it.

The United States also trailed its international counterparts in early childhood education, with only half of U.S. children enrolled in early childhood education at age three, compared to an average of 68 percent among OECD countries. In some countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Sweden, more than 90 percent of three-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education. At age four, 78 percent of U.S. children were enrolled in early childhood education compared to the OECD average of 85 percent.

In its analysis of teacher salaries, the report finds that the average teacher salary increased between 17 percent and 20 percent in real terms between 2000 and 2011; in the United States,

the increase was only 3 percent. The report also finds that the salaries of U.S. teachers are “not competitive” with the salaries of similarly educated workers. On average, a U.S. primary school teacher can expect to earn only 66 percent of the salary of the average tertiary-educated worker in another field, which is lower than the international average of 82 percent. The same is true for an upper secondary school teacher, who can expect to earn 70 percent of what his/her similarly educated peer earns in a different field, compared to the international average of 89 percent. “These relatively low wages may make it difficult to attract the best candidates to the teaching profession,” the report notes.

A summary of findings for the United States is available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/United%20States%20EAG2013%20Country%20Note.pdf>.

The full report, which includes the complete international rankings, is available at [http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20\(eng\)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20(eng)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf).



EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS: New Publication Examines How Early Warning Data Can Keep Students on Track Toward College and a Career

State policymakers should work with districts and schools to implement early warning systems (EWS) that help educators keep high school students on track toward college and career readiness, a new report from Data Quality Campaign finds. The report, *Using Early Warning Data to Keep Students on Track Toward College and Careers*, explores the options states have for aggregating and translating student data into actionable information they can use to prevent students from dropping out and meeting their individual needs.

By utilizing EWS, states can find patterns and trends, or predictive indicators, for student achievement, the report notes. By analyzing data points, such as behavioral problems, course grades, and attendance records, schools can more easily pinpoint students at risk for dropping out and provide additional supports to help them succeed. These interventions come in the form of addressing students’ unique academic, social, and emotional needs. These data points can be broadened to target students who need more rigorous course work to meet their full potential. The report points out the necessity of balancing student privacy with tailoring the early warning indicators to meet stakeholders’ needs.

In order for EWS to be as effective in meeting students where they are, state policymakers need to act now to get the critical data into the hands of school leaders, educators, and parents, the report argues. Every state has access to large quantities of data; the key is disseminating the information and using it to benefit students. The report identifies four steps policymakers can take to improve EWS and promote it in schools and districts:

1. Encourage the use of predictive analysis to inform action by educators and others involved with assisting students to improve learning outcomes.
2. Support the development of research-based indicators for predictive analysis.
3. Ensure that early warning data are timely, of high quality, and consistent to inform indicators.

