



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



ESEA ON THE WAY?: House Passes Legislation to Rewrite NCLB; Bill Faces Big Hurdle in Senate Where Separate Legislation Remains Stalled

On July 19, by a vote of 221–207, with no Democrats voting in support, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). House Republicans said the legislation, named the Student Success Act, would “restore local control, support effective teachers, reduce the federal footprint, and empower parents,” while House Democrats said that it “walks away from our nation’s civil rights responsibility to ensure all children have access to a quality education.”

“For the first time in more than a decade, the House has approved legislation to revamp K–12 education law,” [said House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline \(R-MN\)](#). “This is a monumental step forward in the fight to improve the nation’s education system and ensure a brighter future for our children. The Student Success Act will tear down barriers to progress and grant states and districts the freedom and flexibility they need to think bigger, innovate, and take whatever steps are necessary to raise the bar in our schools.”

By limiting the involvement of the federal government in education, the Student Success Act is a direct response to what Republicans believe is an overstep by the Obama administration in recent years, especially in regard to waivers the administration has granted from certain requirements of NCLB in exchange for reform. A [summary of the bill](#) released by the House Education and the Workforce Committee notes that it would “protect state and local autonomy over decisions in the classroom by limiting the authority of the secretary of education” and “eliminate federally mandated actions and interventions currently required of poor-performing schools.”

The bill would eliminate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and replace it with state-determined accountability systems free of federal safeguards. That differs from the path taken by the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), which passed its own bill to rewrite NCLB out of committee on June 12. That bill, the Strengthening America’s Schools Act would also eliminate AYP in favor of state- and locally-designed accountability systems, but it calls for reform in low-performing schools, including high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent.

“The Alliance appreciates the Student Success Act’s inclusion of the adjusted cohort rate graduation rate requirement for calculating and reporting purposes,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “However, unlike its Senate counterpart, the Student Success Act lacks any graduation rate accountability

and fails to ensure adequate reform in low-performing high schools, including the more than 1,400 high schools with graduation rates below 60 percent. In addition, the bill eliminates funding for the High School Graduation Initiative, the only federal program dedicated solely to strengthening high schools.”

In addition to the HSGI, the Student Success Act would eliminate more than seventy existing elementary and secondary education programs, including the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program and funding for state assessments.

“NCLB is very much the education reform of the past. It is inflexible. It encouraged some states to lower their standards. That’s why it’s time to rewrite this law—to embrace the principle that all students can learn if given the opportunity and to encourage high standards that meet the needs of a twenty-first-century global economy,” [said U.S. Representative George Miller \(D-CA\), senior Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee.](#)

“Unfortunately, [the Student Success Act] moves our education system in the wrong direction for students and schools already struggling under a broken system. It lets American kids down at a critical time.”

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan agreed and said he would recommend that President Obama veto the Students Success Act if it were presented to him.

“[The Student Success Act] marks a retreat from high standards for all students and would virtually eliminate accountability for the learning of historically underserved students—a huge step backward for efforts to improve academic achievement,” [Duncan said.](#) “It would lock in major cuts to education funding at a time when continued investments in education are the only way we can remain competitive on the world stage.”

The bill was referred to the Senate, where legislation passed by the HELP Committee—the Strengthening America’s Schools Act (SASA)—also awaits further action. **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 it 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.

Although he opposed SASA during its consideration by the HELP Committee, **U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), top Republican on the HELP Committee,** said he “will fully support” Harkin’s effort to bring the bill to the floor for senators to debate it and offer amendments.

With one bill to rewrite NCLB passed out of the House and another one passed out of the Senate HELP Committee—even though the two bills are widely apart in their approach to the federal role in education—the prospect of an NCLB rewrite is brighter now than at any point in the last few years.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WASHINGTON, DC?: Alliance Holds Webinar on Latest Developments in Federal Education Policy

On July 24, members of the Alliance for Excellent Education's federal advocacy team held a webinar to discuss two bills moving through the U.S. Congress to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Each bill was constructed by the majority party in its chamber—Democrats in the Senate and Republicans in the House—setting forth two very different visions of the federal government's role in education.

During the webinar, **Phillip Lovell**, the Alliance's vice president of federal advocacy, **Jessica Cardichon**, the Alliance's director of federal advocacy, and **Fred Jones**, the Alliance's legislative associate, examined key differences between the two pieces of legislation and discussed the likelihood of a bill reaching the president's desk. They also provided updates on the federal budget and appropriations process and the U.S. Department of Education's waivers from key provisions of NCLB.



Video and PowerPoint slides from the webinar are available at <http://media.all4ed.org/webinar-jul-24-2013>.



E-RATE MODERNIZATION: FCC Seeks Input on Plan to Modernize E-Rate and Expand Access to Broadband Internet Connections in Nation's Schools and Libraries

On July 19, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced first steps toward modernization of the E-rate program—the federal government's program for connecting the nation's schools and libraries to the internet—to provide students and teachers with access to high-capacity broadband.

“Technology has the power to revolutionize education in America,” [said Mignon Clyburn, acting chairwoman of the FCC](#). “But we are not where we need to be relative to other nations and to the rate of technology adoption in this nation. And one of the biggest obstacles to seizing the opportunities of digital learning in America is inadequate bandwidth at our schools and libraries. Simply put, they need faster high-capacity connections and they need them now. Today, however, we take an important step toward ensuring that our schools and libraries have the bandwidth they need: we launch a modernization of E-Rate that the times demand and our children deserve.”

According to a [release from the FCC](#), the E-rate program has successfully connected virtually all U.S. libraries and schools, including 97 percent of U.S. classrooms, to the internet, compared to only 14 percent when E-rate was first established in 1997. It adds, however, that half of E-rate applicants had slower connection speeds than the average American home.

To meet the increased demand on the program, the FCC set forth three proposed goals to modernize E-rate: (1) increased broadband capacity; (2) cost-effective purchasing; and (3) streamlined program administration.

“When it comes to accessing the internet, the nation’s teachers and students are stuck on a two-lane street in an eight-lane world,” [said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia](#). “This quick action from the FCC is the first step in a plan to provide 99 percent of America’s students with high-speed internet access through next-generation broadband in schools and libraries within five years.”

Between now and September 16, the FCC is seeking public comments on how to advance its goals. For more information, visit <http://www.fcc.gov/e-rate-update>.



YEAR 3 OF IMPEMENTING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: States Unlikely to Reverse Decision to Adopt Common Core, Say “Vast Majority” of Key Education Officials

Key education officials in a “vast majority” of states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics say it is unlikely that their state would “reverse, limit, or change” its decision to adopt the standards during the 2013–14 school year, according to a new report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at the George Washington University. *Year 3 of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: State Education Agencies’ Views on the Federal Role*, is the third in a series of reports that track states’ progress in implementing the CCSS through surveys of deputy state superintendents of education or their designees. Forty states responded to the 2013 survey, including thirty-nine states that had adopted the CCSS in both ELA and math and one that had adopted the standards in ELA only.

“What we found is that, while there might be resistance to the Common Core, it isn’t coming from state education agencies,” [said Maria Ferguson, executive director of CEP](#). “State leaders are more focused on finding resources and guidance to carry out the demanding steps required for full implementation.”

According to the report, thirty-seven of the forty CCSS-adopting states that participated in the spring 2013 survey felt that their state would not go back on its decision to adopt the standards; two states said they did not know and one state said it was “somewhat likely” that it would reverse, limit, or change the standards in school year 2013–14.

The report notes that opposition to the CCSS has led to attempts to delay or roll back the standards in several states, including Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota. With the exceptions of Michigan and Indiana, which have halted funding for implementation, these efforts have been “largely unsuccessful,” the report finds. In fact, only five states said that overcoming resistance to the CCSS from sources outside the K–12 system posed a “major” challenge although twenty-four states saw overcoming this resistance as a “minor” challenge, as shown in the table below. Two states believed overcoming resistance to the CCSS from institutions of higher education presented a major challenge.

Source of resistance	Major challenge	Minor challenge	Not a challenge	Not an SEA activity	Not within SEA's authority	Too soon to tell	Don't know
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from sources outside the K-12 system (other than higher education)	5	24	7	1	0	1	1
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from within the K-12 system	0	21	17	1	0	0	0
Overcoming resistance to the CCSS from institutions of higher education	2	16	17	1	0	3	0

The report acknowledges that some of the states declining to participate in the survey were among those that have faced challenges to the standards. Other states facing challenges did participate in the survey so their experiences are captured.

When asked whether the federal government should assist them and their districts with implementing the CCSS through a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), thirty-three states said that “authorizing and appropriating federal funds through ESEA to assist states generally with CCSS implementation would help their efforts to transition to the Common Core.”

At least thirty states also said the federal government could help (1) provide state and district professional development activities for teachers and principals regarding the CCSS; (2) help states with the costs of implementing the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC); and (3) support the updating and maintenance of the CCSS-aligned assessments being developed by PARCC and SBAC.

A large majority of states also expressed support for legislative changes to Title I, which provides support for low-income students, and Title III, which supports students with limited English proficiency, to help teachers teach CCSS content to students served by those programs. Only two states said that they did not want federal assistance with implementing the standards.

About one-third of states surveyed favored non-legislative changes that could help with CCSS implementation, such as guidance on how ESEA funds, including Titles I and III, can currently be used to support state and district efforts to implement the CCSS. When asking about non-legislative changes, CEP separately analyzed the responses of the twenty-nine participating states that had been granted a waiver from key provisions of NCLB. Of those, twenty-two said waiver flexibility is helping them transition to the CCSS. And out of those twenty-two, fourteen did not indicate support for any other non-legislative changes, “perhaps [signifying] that in these fourteen states, the waiver alone is sufficient to help them navigate the ESEA requirements and the Common Core,” the report notes.

“It is pretty clear that state leaders see the federal government as having a role to play in Common Core implementation,” said Ferguson. “Exactly what that role is and how that support is structured moving forward will represent a key decision point for both the Common Core and any future ESEA reauthorization.”

The complete report is available at <http://bit.ly/18HSfTc>.



CHANGE AGENTS: New Report Examines Principals' Roles in Student Success; How States Can Develop Effective School Leaders

Principals are the primary agents of change in schools, and their effectiveness as leaders plays a key role in improving student achievement, a new report from New Leaders finds. The report, *Change Agents: How States Can Develop Effective School Leaders*, encourages states to develop a pipeline for attracting and retaining educational leaders and a high-quality system for licensing and relicensing principals.

“As the leader of a school, the principal plays a vital role in setting expectations for teachers and students. All around the country, school leaders are doing incredible jobs turning around low-performing schools and ensuring that students graduate ready for college and career, but there are still not enough of these effective individuals,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, on New Leaders’s report. “If states are serious about ensuring that all students meet the high standards set by the Common Core State Standards, they must also get serious about school leadership, including principal preparation, licensure, and professional learning opportunities.”

The key to states building a strong pipeline of excellent leaders is a high-quality principal preparation program, the report finds. According to results from a recent survey of principals, 96 percent felt on-the-job experience was more beneficial than their graduate programs. The majority of states rely on weak curriculum and credit hours to award certificates and accreditations. A strong preparation program, the report notes, includes a rigorous selection process, high-quality curriculum paired with clinical work in an authentic setting, and continuous program review and improvement. In a strong preparation program, “there is no magic number of courses or seat-time requirements; instead candidates should be expected to accomplish necessary tasks,” the report reads.

Programs also need a systematic process for collaboration with districts, educators, and interested stakeholders. “In order to meet the needs of districts, preparation programs must be aware of the needs of the field,” the report cautions.

In addition, states use various and sometimes multiple entities to approve principal preparation programs for accreditation. The report recommends that states develop one clear program approval system that uses research-based best practices for principal preparation. When it comes time to renew programs, the approval system should measure placement and retention rates, district satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and impact on student outcomes for states to ensure that the principals entering the system are meeting the state’s needs.

“A robust program approval process can help states raise the expectations for the quality of principal preparation programs and develop a pipeline of principals who get results for students,” the report finds.

The second part of the critical process for developing a deep pipeline of qualified principals is improving licensure systems. The report reveals that the standards the majority of states use to license principals do not include a demonstration of job readiness and are not strongly correlated

with effectiveness on the job. In fact, only six states consider any effectiveness data when renewing principal licenses.

“Most state licensure systems lack rigor, are not closely aligned to the expectations for principals, and are disconnected from job performance,” the report notes.

In expanding the pipeline of potential principals, states need to consider removing existing barriers, such as a required master’s degree. States should work to bring new talent into the system and develop already existing talent within the system, the report explains.

“Now is the time for states to take action to improve their own processes for principal preparation and licensure in order to get the best candidates into our schools,” the report reads. “This policy drive towards a focus on outcomes will create the needed change agents and also develop the necessary knowledge base all states can use to get better over time.”

The complete report is available at

<http://www.newleaders.org/newsreports/publications/change-agents/>.

	<p style="text-align: center;">A Summer Postcard from the Alliance for Excellent Education</p> <p>Dear <i>Straight A's</i> Reader,</p> <p>With schools around the country out for summer and Congress out of town for its August recess, the Alliance newsletter—although not the Alliance staff—will be taking a brief summer vacation.</p> <p>The next issue of <i>Straight A's</i> will be on September 9. In the meantime, please follow the Alliance on Twitter at www.twitter.com/all4ed, like the Alliance on Facebook at www.facebook.com/all4ed, and visit the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog for the latest education news. Also keep an eye on the Alliance’s website for upcoming webinars at http://www.all4ed.org/events/upcoming.</p>
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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).