



# Straight A's:

## A Citizen's Update on Education

Volume 1 No. 1: November 12, 2001

**Straight A's: A Citizen's Update on Education** is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on education policy and key national issues accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a non-profit organization working to help make it possible for every child in America to receive an excellent education. Our goal is to make an excellent education the right of every child, to establish this as national policy, and to make it a reality for all children within this decade. To learn more about the Alliance, please visit our website at <http://www.all4ed.org> or e-mail us at [Alliance@all4ed.org](mailto:Alliance@all4ed.org).

**Is your Member of Congress in this issue?** This issue of *Straight A's* spotlights Members of Congress from Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, and South Dakota.

## **A**round the Capitol

All buildings on the House side of the Capitol have reopened, though individual offices where anthrax was found remained closed for decontamination. Still facing cleanup is the Hart Senate Office Building where **Senator Majority Leader Tom Daschle's (D-SD)** office is located. On Tuesday, November 6, officials abandoned plans to pump chlorine dioxide gas into the building amid fears it may not work. They now say the building will not reopen before Nov. 21. **Republican Policy Committee Chairman Larry Craig (R-ID)** said "In the best case scenario, we're in there after Thanksgiving recess." The U.S. Postal Service said Tuesday, November 6<sup>th</sup> that it had begun sanitizing mail going to congressional offices and would start delivering it to House and Senate office buildings again.

Amidst all of the confusion and doubt surrounding the anthrax investigation, the Senate began work on the Fiscal Year 2002 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill on October 30<sup>th</sup>. In his introductory remarks on this bill, H.R. 3061, **Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA)** made the following comments:

*Education continues to be a top priority of this subcommittee, and while our bill provides substantial new investments in quality education, it is my strong hope and expectation that more resources will be provided when we complete action on the education reform bill now in conference.*

*I also sit on that conference committee, led by our distinguished chairman, **Senator [Edward] Kennedy (D-MA)**. That bill, which is now in conference, contains an amendment that was offered by **Senator [Chuck] Hagel (R-NE)** and me that the Senate approved without one dissenting vote, that we will finally meet our commitment to fully fund special education.*

### **Did You Know?**

During this session of Congress, Members are in the process of re-authorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This Act, which affects grades K-12, comes up for re-authorization every five years. It does not allocate money, but lays out the structure of the programs and sets a spending ceiling or authorized level on each program in the bill. The Labor-HHS-Education Appropriation Act is an annual occurrence. Each year, Congress decides how much money it is actually willing to allocate for each of the federal education programs. This year Congress hopes to send both bills to the President by Thanksgiving.

### **Senate Allocates \$1.8 Billion Increase for Title I**

The Senate reported a bipartisan bill out of committee that would provide an increase of \$6.3 billion (14.9 percent) for Department of Education appropriated programs. It also provides an increase of \$1.8 billion in Title I grants to school districts, a 17 percent increase and the first significant increase for Title I in many years. The Senate passed the Fiscal Year 2002 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill on November 7<sup>th</sup> by a vote of 89 to 10. The following are a couple of amendments that the Senate successfully added to the final bill:

- **Sen. Mary Landrieu's (D-LA)** amendment which redirects \$1.65 billion from Title I basic grants with \$1 billion going to targeted grants to help disadvantaged students and \$650 million going to education finance incentive grants which reward states that have a policy of fairly distributing resources among school districts. Sen. Landrieu had this to say about her amendment:

*The fact is that among these 50 States there are some States and some communities and some districts and some counties and some parishes that simply do not have the resources to make the grade. They have the will. They have the skill. They have the desire. And the children, because of the way God created them, have the brains... These are the children Title I tries to reach: first-generation immigrants, families that have been in this country for many years struggling to get ahead, families that work hard and save their hard-earned dollars. Yet when we do not provide the funds through the targeted grants, we often miss the opportunity to meet these families halfway. I think we have an obligation, on the federal level, because of the disparity, because of the great inequity, to do what we can to try to level this playing field.*

The amendment passed in a roll call vote on Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>, by a vote of 81 to 19.

## Did You Know?

In his floor statement supporting the Landrieu amendment, **Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH)** offered this little bit of history on the targeted grant formula affected by the amendment:

*A little history. This grant formula, this targeted grant formula, as it is called, was created in 1994. It recognized the great disparity in this country between poor school districts and rich school districts, the great disparity between children who are in poverty and children who are not in poverty. However, unbelievably and tragically, since the creation of these grants in 1994, not a single federal dollar, not one dollar, has been appropriated to fund this grant program--that is until now with these two amendments. [The second amendment to which Sen. DeWine refers is **Senator Judd Gregg's (R-NH)** amendment that would have moved federal money from school construction to the targeted grant formula. The amendment failed 46-54.] These amendments would fundamentally begin fulfilling the promise and commitment the Federal Government made to the poor children of this country in 1994. This is unprecedented. It is historic.*

- Sen. Harkin's manager's amendment on behalf of **Sens. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)**, **Daschle (D-SD)**, **Kennedy (D-MA)** and others that, if signed into law, would add \$200 million to the Senate bill, H.R. 3061, including \$100 million for bilingual education, **\$58 million for GEAR-UP**, \$25 million for migrant education, \$4 million for Hispanic serving institutions, \$3 million for HEP, and \$5 million for CAMP passed on Nov. 1.

## Did You Know?

Including Sen. Harkin's amendment, GEAR UP is funded at \$285 million. GEAR UP creates college opportunities for at-risk youth. Enacted in 1998, GEAR UP funds partnerships of high-poverty middle schools, colleges and universities, community organizations, and business to work with entire grade levels of students. These partnerships provide tutoring, mentoring, information on college preparation and financial aid, with an emphasis on core academic preparation and, in some cases, scholarships. GEAR UP works with students from 7th grade, and sometimes earlier, through high school graduation. *For more information, visit the U.S. Department of Education website at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup/>*

The House of Representatives passed their version of the Labor, HHS-Education bill on Oct. 11 by a vote of 373 to 43. The House bill contains \$527 million more in total education discretionary funding than the Senate bill and \$300 million more for Title I.

## **A**bout Town

In the November issue of *The Washington Monthly*, Thomas Toch argues that President Bush's education bill is a disaster in the making. At the very core of the problem is Bush's campaign promise to test every third- through eighth-grade student in public schools and hold the school districts accountable for failure to improve. While testing

should be a mandatory component of any education reform proposal, Toch argues that problems arise in Bush's plan because it fails to mandate a national test.

Toch writes that problems in the Bush plan first arose in April when the Bush model was applied retroactively to test scores in Connecticut, North Carolina and Texas, three states that had significantly improved their test scores in recent years. Under the Bush plan, a vast majority of schools in these three states would be labeled failures.

Rather than shelving the education bill until next year due to the events of Sept. 11th, President Bush stepped up the pressure on congressional leaders to enact a bill before Thanksgiving. Toch argues that this action could actually harm the education standards movement:

*So, rather than openly debating the bill's many defects, Congress is now under intense pressure to pass something—anything—fast. And the likely result will be legislation that hurts the nation's students more than it helps them, promotes lower rather than high standards; misleads the public about school performance; pushes top teachers out of schools where they are most needed; and drives down the level of instruction in many classrooms.*

Toch believes the education bill can be salvaged by adding a national test of reading and math that tests students' grip on higher-level skills and knowledge, not just "the basics."

#### **Alliance Report:**

In the Alliance report, "**Investing in Excellence: Making Title I Work for All Students**," the Alliance argues that setting higher standards and providing every child with an excellent education to meet these higher standards is paramount. But even as our country pledges to "leave no child behind," we may be creating a system that will leave behind not just one child but an entire generation of children. Regardless of which method—state or national—is ultimately preferred, the Alliance argues the advent of testing, especially new high stakes high school exit exams, presents a real dilemma for school administrators. Given a watered-down curriculum when younger, some students now enter high school with the reading ability of fifth- or sixth-graders, yet they are now being asked to pass new rigorous exit exams as a prerequisite to high school graduation. Rather than allocating funds to help these older students in danger of failing, school districts practice a form of educational triage—essentially giving up on the current generation of students in an effort to focus their limited resources on a younger generation.

The Alliance for Excellent Education contends that no school system should have to choose between elementary versus middle and high school students. Our report maintains that the federal government should fully fund Title I of the Elementary and Secondary School Act and target part of this increased investment to support reform in middle and high schools. In its 36 years of existence, Title I has never been fully funded. Title I is currently funded at \$8.76 billion. Full funding would cost an additional \$18.6 billion. Moreover, only 15 percent of Title I funds now go to middle and high schools, even though secondary schools enroll 33 percent of all low-income students. Fully funding Title I would allow school districts to focus on every eligible student, at every grade level.

*The Alliance for Excellent Education's report, "Investing in Excellence: Making Title I Work for All Students," can be found on the Alliance website at [www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org).*

In response to Toch's article, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) offers the following take on the Administration's role in obtaining a national test:

*We've been critical of President Bush and his Administration on many subjects, but we do not doubt his commitment to standards-based education reform, especially for the disadvantaged kids the current system so often fails. Like Nixon going to China, President Bush is perhaps the only political leader in a position to quiet conservative hysteria about national standards and tests, and make his own proposal much more workable.*

To view the entire DLC piece on Toch's article visit their website at [http://www.ndol.org/ndol\\_ci.cfm?contentid=3890&kaid=131&subid=192](http://www.ndol.org/ndol_ci.cfm?contentid=3890&kaid=131&subid=192).

To view "Bush's Big Test" by Thomas Toch in its entirety, please visit Washington Monthly Online at: <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0111.toch.html>

## **A**head on the Calendar

Celebrated every year since 1921, American Education Week offers a great opportunity to raise public awareness about the needs and virtues of public schools. In 1921, the National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assembly in Des Moines, Iowa, called for designation of one week each year to spotlight education. In its resolution, the NEA called for: "An educational week...observed in all communities annually for the purpose of informing the public of the accomplishments and needs of the public schools and to secure the cooperation and support of the public in meeting those needs." American Education Week is always the week prior to the week of Thanksgiving. Therefore, this year's dates are from Nov. 11-17. For more information on American Education Week, please visit the NEA's website at <http://www.nea.org/aew/>.

## **A**lliance At Work

⊕ Recently, the Alliance was represented at the release of a new report by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, in partnership with Collaborative Communications Group, called "Leading Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do." The report is a comprehensive handbook designed to guide elementary and middle level principals in crafting their responsibilities in key instructional areas. These include setting school goals and standards, improving student performance, providing meaningful professional development for faculty and staff, effectively using data and testing tools, and engaging the local community. Please visit NAESP's website at <http://www.naesp.org/comm/prss10-29-01.htm> for more information.

## **A**ll Things Considered

Just 24 hours after the terrorist attacks in Washington, DC and New York City, the nation's leading publication houses called history textbook writers into emergency meetings to "chronicle history as it was happening." *To read the full story, please visit:* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A44717-2001Nov5.html>

## **A**ccording To

"With all of the talk about stimulus and stimulus package, and looking at the stimulus package the House sent us with all of the tax breaks for huge corporations, it seems to me the best stimulus we could provide would be to send money directly to our communities so they could repair and modernize their schools. We get a couple bangs for the buck on that. We put people to work; it stimulates local economies, and of course that has a backup effect because there will be suppliers of different equipment, and it provides for all kinds of multiplier effects in the economy."

**-Senator Tom Harkin's (D-IA)** introductory remarks on on Fiscal Year 2002 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill, October 30, 2001.

*To learn more about the economic stimulus package, please visit:*  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A51153-2001Nov6.htm>.

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