



ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# Straight A's:

## An Update on Public Education: Policy and Progress

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### U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION ESTIMATES 8,600 SCHOOLS NEED IMPROVEMENT: 3.5 Million Students Would be Left Behind

**U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige** recently estimated that 8,600 schools, serving as many as 3.5 million students, would fail to meet adequate yearly progress goals under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The U.S. Department of Education is reporting this information based on state standards and the most recently available state data. In some cases, states have taken issue with the estimate because it is based on information reported a few years ago.

#### **No Child Left Behind Brings Changes to 1994 Law**

The *1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act* required each state to develop state content standards, assessments and definitions of adequate yearly progress (AYP) but allowed for great latitude in how a state measures such progress. As a result, some states defined progress as closing the achievement gap between subgroups of students, while others defined it as meeting certain test scores on state tests. A third group measured growth or progress on state tests from one year to the next. Regardless of its measuring stick, a school that failed to make state-defined AYP for two or more years was identified as in need of “school improvement.”

Under *No Child Left Behind*, any Title I elementary or secondary school that fails to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years must give students the opportunity to attend other public schools, with the district using a portion of Title I money to pay for transportation. If a school fails a third consecutive year, its disadvantaged students are eligible for “supplemental services” such as tutoring, after-school help, and summer school.

Test results from the 2001-02 and 2002-03 school year will determine the first round of schools failing to make progress under the law, but almost all schools currently identified as in need of “school improvement” under the 1994 law will have to provide public school choice and supplemental services as early as fall 2002.

## U.S. Secretary of Education Estimates 8,600 Schools Need Improvement

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### Effect in the States

Because the 1994 law allowed states to define adequate yearly progress in a variety of ways, some states are being hit harder than others by the AYP standard. For example, two states, Arkansas and Wyoming, reported having no schools that failed to meet standards for two consecutive years. On the other hand, Louisiana and North Carolina found that up to 80 percent and 65 percent, respectively, of their schools could be identified as needing improvement.

In Kentucky, 107 schools were identified as failing, but some of the Kentucky schools on Paige's list had only slight decreases in their test scores—and some had even made dramatic improvements. For example, Wrigley Elementary was one of the highest-scoring schools in the state for the past four years, but slipped a few points in 1999 and 2000, triggering an assistance designation in the state system. Another school, Oneida Elementary, improved by 20 points last year, but was classified as a failing school based on 1998-2000 scores.

Michigan identified more than 1,500 schools as chronically failing, more than any other state. That accounts for about one-third of the state's public schools, but state officials said the high number reflects the rigor of Michigan's standards and tests.

States that have set very high standards may find it difficult to bring all students up to the "proficient" level by 2014, as required by *No Child Left Behind*. Faced with this difficulty, Robert Linn, the co-director of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing and professor of education at the University of Colorado at Boulder, fears that many states will take the easy route and adjust their standards. "The worry I have," he told *Education Week*, "is that states that have been doing a good job—that is, they've established ambitious targets—are going to be tempted to lower their standards and to water down their tests. And that would be counter to what I think most of the people who were behind the law really wanted to happen."

*Education Week* article, "Frustration Grows as States Await 'Adequate Yearly Progress' Advice": <http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=42ayp.h21>



### **PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION PROPOSES CHANGES TO SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW: Refuses to Support Mandatory Federal Funding**

According to the 2000 Census, 1 in 12 children (5.2 million) have some physical or mental disability. Since 1975, these children have been guaranteed the right to a "free, appropriate public education" by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. Prior to its implementation, approximately 1 million children with disabilities were shut out of schools and hundreds of thousands more were denied appropriate services. Last week, a special commission studying *IDEA* issued a report that made nine key recommendations to Senate and House Education committees on how the act could be improved, but refused to call for mandatory federal funding for special education.

Created on Oct. 2, 2001, by President Bush, the **Commission on Excellence in Special Education** was directed to collect information and study issues related to federal, state, and local special education programs. Its goal was to recommend policies for improving the education performance of students with disabilities. Appearing at the committee hearings were former Iowa Gov. **Terry E. Branstad**, who chaired the commission, and commissioners **Doug Huntt** and **Doug Gill**.

Congress has already held meetings on *IDEA* reauthorization, but it had been waiting on the commission's report before fully tackling the issue and moving forward with legislation. While *IDEA* is due for reauthorization this year, many people believe that Congress will not complete the process before the end of the year.

The commission report called for less paperwork and regulations and a greater focus on student achievement and closing the achievement gap between general education students and students with disabilities. It also promoted early identification and intervention programs while stressing the importance of teaching reading, with these comments:

*“Of those with “specific learning disabilities,” 80% are there simply because they haven’t learned how to read. Thus, many children identified for special education—up to 40%—are there because they weren’t taught to read. The reading difficulties may not be their only area of difficulty, but it’s the area that resulted in special education placement. Sadly, few children placed in special education close the achievement gap to a point where they can read and learn like their peers.”*

The report failed to endorse mandatory federal funding for *IDEA*. When the law was passed in 1975, Congress set a goal of providing supplemental federal special education funding for up to 40 percent of the national average per-pupil expenditure. Mandatory federal funding would require the federal government to meet the funding level promised in 1975, but it was not one of the commission's recommendations: “While the commission believes that increasing appropriations for *IDEA* should remain a federal priority, it recommends keeping funding for this program as discretionary.”

**Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA)** took the commission to task on the mandatory funding issue. His comments:

*“I’m concerned that the commission did not take a stand on the commitment made by the federal government thirty years ago to fully fund special education. As a result . . . parents, teachers, students and schools across the nation continue to be cheated out of the resources they were promised.”*

## President's Commission Proposes Changes to Special Education Law

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**House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH)** took a conflicting view of mandatory federal funding:

*"This expert panel has soundly rejected the notion of turning special education into a new federal entitlement spending program, which would directly impede our efforts to reform the current system to address the growing concerns of teachers, parents, and children with special needs."*

To read the commission's report visit:

<http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/reports.html>.

More detail on the commission's findings is available on the Alliance Web site at:

<http://www.all4ed.org/newsletter.htm>.



### **WHITE HOUSE REVISES BUDGET DEFICIT PROJECTIONS: New Estimate for 2002 Totals \$165 Billion**

Last week, the **Office of Management and Budget (OMB)** released revised budget estimates that showed the federal government will be up to \$165 billion in deficit spending for fiscal 2002. OMB predicted a smaller budget deficit for the next fiscal year—but only if Congress can curb its spending.

The OMB, which acts as the budgetary arm of the White House and assists the President in overseeing the preparation of the federal budget, said that new spending, tax cuts and significantly lower tax revenue will result in a deficit of as much as \$165 billion this year. Nearly all of the decline in tax revenue is expected to come from losses in capital gains taxes.

This year's deficit marks a dramatic change from just one year ago when the federal government maintained a \$127 billion budget surplus. Many analysts believe that President Bush will be unable to make the 2001 tax cuts permanent without a brighter economic future.



### **ALL OVER THE MAP: New Report Canvases High School Education Policy Across the 50 States**

A new high school report provides a preliminary overview of high school education policy at the state level in each of the 50 states. The report highlights trends, assumptions and tensions in state policy and "establishes a baseline from which to build a better understanding of the state context for high schools."

The **National Alliance on the American High School** report, *All over the Map: State Policies to Improve the High School*, which the Alliance for Excellent Education helped sponsor, emphasizes the need to treat high school education not merely as the concluding point of the K-12 system but as qualitatively distinct and requiring its own policies. The report's recommendations include increasing financial assistance to needy and innovative high schools, connecting high school education to communities and careers, and providing extra help to ensure students can meet increased standards.

The National Alliance on the American High School (HS Alliance) is a loose collaborative effort of 38 organizations committed to improving academic and developmental outcomes for high-school-age youth. The HS Alliance works to “mobilize the resources, knowledge, and capacity of individuals and organizations to work collectively in shaping policy, practice, and public engagement that foster high achievement, close the achievement gap, and promote civic and personal growth among all youth in our high schools and communities.” The Alliance for Excellent Education is a proud member of the National Alliance on the American High School.

*The complete paper is available at: <http://www.hsalliance.org/Allfinal.pdf>.*



### **STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN SELF-DISCIPLINE AND HELP: Students Need Guidance to Stay on Track**

Many underachieving adolescents become detached from school and look for success in dubious activities such as gangs, crime and drugs. Research and successful programs have proved that such teens can be turned around and grow into contributing members of society when parents, teachers and guidance counselors give them the motivation to do so.

Juveniles commit proportionately more than their share of crimes, and those between ages 15 and 18 commit the bulk of the violent offenses. In 1999, there were approximately 2.5 million arrests of youths under 18 for all crimes, constituting 17 percent of all arrests made that year. The growing youth population in jail is costing society money and potential human capital. If society could deter a 15-year-old from a life of crime, it could save approximately \$20,000 in the expenses associated with incarceration and other criminal deterrents, according to the **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**. That expense makes deterring these youth a worthy investment.

Studies in the 1980s and 1990s showed that an alarming number of students are disengaged from school, especially adolescent minorities in urban schools. In *Beyond the Classroom*, **Laurence Steinberg** argued that teenage culture frowns on school success and leads to disengagement. In a conference at the Brookings Institute last month, Steinberg said that for middle schoolers, this problem “has something to do with the nature of junior high schools or middle schools or with the lack of fit between the way these institutions are structured and the developmental needs of young teenagers.”

## **Striking a Balance Between Self-Discipline and Help**

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Parents, educators and policy-makers must understand these needs. The **Search Institute (SI)**, a non-profit dedicated to adolescents' well-being, has identified 40 developmental assets—critical factors for students' growth and development (<http://www.search-institute.org/assets/forty.htm>). “External” assets are those derived from positive experiences that young people have interacting with the people and institutions in their lives, and “internal assets” are those personal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of centeredness, purpose, and focus, shaping dispositions likely to lead to good judgment.

In the fall of 2000, the **Center for National Policy (CNP)** convened a conference to discuss juveniles and the programs that show promise in dealing with them. All the successful youth programs used education and self-discipline to “bring structure, purpose, constructive motivation and a sense of belonging to the lives of young people whose environment is otherwise lacking in these important elements of successful living.”

In its report, *New Programs for Youth Offenders: A Search for Effective National Models*, CNP concluded that the emerging model for programs for at-risk youth is one that combines discipline and help and builds a web of strong interpersonal relationships between the adolescent and adults.

Counselors can be asset-builders at the school level by supporting a collaborative effort between schools and families to develop programs that give adolescents the eight developmental assets they need. A study by N.E. Amundson, W.A. Borgen and E. Tench found high school students are trying to meet personal and career-related needs, which are in a state of flux and uncertainty. The study suggested that counseling should recognize the developmental needs of adolescents and base guidance on the student's personal and career competence.

All students—at-risk students, juvenile offenders, or average adolescents—need this type of support from adults. “A successful child today can become a struggling teen tomorrow if caring adults do nothing to meet her or his changing developmental needs or to positively impact daily experiences,” noted the Search Institute in its October 1999 newsletter.

*Read more about the Search Institute at: <http://www.search-institute.org>.*

*For more statistics on juvenile crime visit the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at: <http://www.ojjdp.org>.*

*For the full report by the Center on National Policy visit <http://www.cnp.org>.*



## **NO MORE VICTIMS: New Program Helps Teens not to Follow in Their Parents Footsteps**

Ten million children in the United States have had a mother or father in prison at some point in their lives, according to a recent article in *U.S. News and World Report*. These children are eight times more likely to be incarcerated themselves one day. Normally, a high school like M.B. Smiley in Houston, where approximately 40 percent of the students have parents who are or have been incarcerated, would be in serious trouble, but a new program has been working to relieve the extra burden these teens face and keep them out of prison.

**No More Victims**, established in 1993 by a former parole officer, acknowledges the trauma experienced by many school children with parents in prison, providing support in an effort to stop the cycle that lands generation after generation behind bars.

Each class begins with an open session in which students can share worries or news about their parent. The class is heavy on role playing to help students learn to communicate effectively and deal with an impending meeting with their father or mother. The teachers invite speakers to class who have broken out of the cycle: rappers, professional athletes and business owners, among others. No More Victims also provides food, clothing, and school supplies, as well as weekly support sessions with parents and guardians.

Attending No More Victims classes is voluntary, and at first many children were reluctant to show up and admit that one or more of their parents was in prison. However, the supportive atmosphere has won over many students; in fact, almost 10 percent of the school attends the class on a semi-regular basis. Since the program's inception, teachers have noted positive changes in students, particularly in improved attendance.

No More Victims is funded by grants from the **Hogg Foundation** and the **Houston Endowment** and operates with five full-time staff members. In addition to reaching students, No More Victims has a reciprocal program in correctional facilities to help mothers and fathers understand how their choices and behavior impact their children.

*To read more about No More Victims, visit: <http://www.nomorevictimsinc.org/>*

*U.S. News and World Report:*

*<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/020429/ideas/22prisons.htm>*

**Straight A's: A Citizen's Update on Education** is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, D.C., 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. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a non-profit organization working to make it possible for America's six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.