



ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

Straight A's:

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ONE WEEK LATER: House of Representatives Passes Key Component of the Alliance's *Framework for an Excellent Education*

Exactly one week after the release of the Alliance for Excellent Education's new report, *Every Child a Graduate*, the House of Representatives passed the "Canceling Loans to Allow School Systems to Attract Classroom Teachers Act" (CLASS ACT), a loan-forgiveness bill for teachers that embodies a key component of the report's Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative. Passed by voice vote on Oct. 1, the bill, H.R. 5091, would provide up to \$17,500 in loan forgiveness for qualified teachers who teach five years in a Title I school.

The payment would be made in a lump sum after a teacher has fulfilled the requirement for five consecutive years of full-time teaching in a qualified elementary or secondary school. To qualify, a school must be in a school district eligible for Title I grants and must have more than 30 percent of its students from low-income families. In addition, teachers must be deemed qualified as elementary school teachers or be secondary school teachers teaching in an area related to their college major. In making the payments on behalf of teachers, the Secretary of Education would have to give priority to special education teachers, teachers in failing schools, and math or science teachers. The House bill expands the \$5,000 teacher loan forgiveness program in current law and is very similar to a proposal included in the President's budget.

Harkin Gets Ball Rolling on Teacher Loan Forgiveness in the Senate

Last week, **Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA)** introduced a loan forgiveness bill along the lines of the House-passed version. While the House bill requires an appropriation to make the \$17,500 possible, Harkin's bill would guarantee the full amount to every qualified teacher. In addition, Harkin would allow loan forgiveness to any teacher who teaches for five years in a Title I school—without the priority that the House gives to special education, math and science teachers. It is doubtful that the Senate will have time to act on this proposal before adjourning this year, but **Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee**, wants to include a loan forgiveness program in the the Higher Education Act reauthorization expected next year.

Tax Credits for Teachers:

In its recent report, *Every Child a Graduate*, the Alliance makes the case for a \$4,000 annual income tax credit to encourage America's best teachers and principals to accept the challenge of working in high-poverty schools. The credit would go to teachers in states and school districts that are willing to increase resources dedicated to paying teachers as skilled professionals. Some lawmakers have already seized on this initiative, albeit with a lower amount than the Alliance recommends.

I TEACH: New Federal Tax Credit Would Help Recruit and Retain Qualified Teachers

A new bill introduced by **Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV (D-WV)** would provide financial incentives to help school districts recruit and retain qualified teachers. The Incentives to Educate American Children Act (I TEACH) would reward individuals for their commitment to teaching in two ways. The bill, S. 2844, would provide a \$1,000 tax credit for teachers who work in rural or low-income schools and provide a \$1,000 tax credit to teachers who earn a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.

"This bill promotes and rewards high quality standards [for] a profession that is often overlooked and taken for granted," Rockefeller said. "American educators are unsung heroes. They work diligently to prepare our kids for the future and often do not receive the compensation and rewards they deserve."

House Bill Would Offer Tax Credits for Teachers

A bill by **Congresswoman Heather Wilson (R-NM)** would provide a \$2,000 non-refundable tax credit for teachers, assistant teachers, principals and assistant principals who teach full time in a Title I school. The bill targets Title I schools because they are in the poorest neighborhoods and have the greatest difficulty keeping experienced teachers. If the bill is passed, the tax credits would be available to teachers in the 44,877 Title I schools in the country beginning in the 2003 tax year.



HAPPY NEW YEAR: End of Fiscal Year 2002 Brings No New Agreement on Education Spending

After spending (or not spending in this case) most of the year disagreeing over funding levels for fiscal year 2003, Democrats and Republicans in Congress finally reached the end of their rope on Sept. 30. With no appropriations bills signed into law, and the fiscal year coming to an end, Congress was forced to pass a continuing resolution that funds all government programs at the previous year's level.

While a continuing resolution will prevent a government shutdown similar to the one the nation faced in 1995, many programs, including those in education, will remain frozen until Congress can agree on spending totals. For now, the prognosis is unclear, but most Members of Congress do not expect an agreement until after the November elections—at the earliest. Other projections are far more grim and would extend the continuing resolution until January, March, or even May. At stake are billions of dollars for key education programs. Title I, for instance, was slated for at least a \$1.5 billion increase in the Senate bill and special education would have received a little over a \$1 billion increase. Instead these programs will remain at last year's level unless a new bill is passed.

In the meantime, no decision on education funding will mean that school districts across the country may be unable to budget for the 2003-2004 school year and will be forced to lay off many teachers and support staff. Considering these dire consequences, it should come as no surprise that most Americans want the House and Senate to resolve their spending differences now. According to a recent poll, 80 percent of those surveyed believe that Congress should increase federal education spending now, not wait until after the elections (Ipsos-Reid, July 11-14, 2002).

Basic Education Coalition Seeks Federal Funding for Education Overseas

A recent *Education Week* article spotlights the Basic Education Coalition and the work it is doing to increase U.S. education funding for poor countries throughout the world. The article cites evidence from UNICEF and the World Bank that 40 percent of students who enroll in primary school do not complete fifth grade. If these trends were to continue, 30 percent of the world's children will not attend school or learn to read or write by 2015.

If these staggering numbers alone were not enough to support additional education funding overseas, the events of Sept. 11, 2001 and the subsequent focus on the military-style training camps and the general prohibition of girls attending schools employed by al Qaeda have given even more importance to ensuring a basic education for all children. The Basic Education Coalition, a group of 16 aid and development organizations, argues that investing in education overseas now will not only result in improved economic growth and prosperity for these countries, but also a better quality of life. In addition, it can imbue students with the knowledge and judgment that promotes tolerance and understanding among peoples.

Last year, basic education in developing countries received a total of about \$165 million in funding. The Basic Education Coalition's goal for 2003 is \$250 million—most of which comes from the foreign operations appropriations bill.

To read the *Education Week* article, visit: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=03lobby.h22>
To learn more about the Basic Education Coalition, visit: <http://www.basiced.org/>



FOCUS ON PRINCIPALS: Texas Attacks a Potential Principal Shortage

In its recent report, *Every Child a Graduate*, the Alliance makes the case for a Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative that encourages our best teachers and principals to work in high-need schools, to improve their skills, and to grow in their professions. While the shortage of high-quality teachers always seems to be a widely acknowledged problem, a quiet crisis involving the lack of high-quality principals is now sweeping the country.

According to a 1998 survey of 403 school districts by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, half of all respondents—elementary, middle school, and high school—believed there was a shortage of qualified principal candidates. In Texas, where about 40 percent of Texas principals will be eligible to retire in the next decade, school districts have already developed programs to fill these vacancies when they occur.

Writing for *The Star-Telegram*, Lamor Williams writes that the Arlington and Ft. Worth school districts employ a “grow your own” program where teachers receive principal internships, mentoring, and other training in preparation for life as school administrators.

To read *The Star-Telegram* article, visit: <http://www.dfw.com/mld/dfw/4170017.htm>

No Excuses: Principal Gets Results in Texas Middle School

“You want to know what kind of principal you have? Look at her feet. If she’s wearing heels all day, she’s not spending enough time walking from classroom to classroom.” So begins an excellent article about Nancy Blackwell, principal for Hambrick Middle School in Houston.

Writing for *The Dallas Morning News*, Joshua Benton tells the story of Blackwell’s success turning Hambrick Middle School into what many consider to be Texas’ best middle school. Last year, 99.3 percent of Hambrick’s students passed the state math test; the passing rates for black, white, and Hispanic students were all about 98 percent. Such success is even more remarkable considering that more than 75 percent of Hambrick’s students are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches and 93 percent of its seventh- and eighth-graders are minority students, many of whom are recent immigrants from Mexico.

Blackwell demanded higher expectations, sought centralized control of curriculum matters, and implemented regular testing. But first she had to eliminate gang activity. She removed all of the school’s lockers to widen hallways and eliminated all school bells to encourage calm time between classes. Afterward, she employed a strict dress code and installed metal detectors at school entrances. Blackwell’s changes at Hambrick met with resistance at first. Now, some parents use a false address so their kids can attend Hambrick.

With the structural tools in place, Blackwell then turned to more academic matters. She doubled the amount of time students spent in math and language arts and trained teachers how to best utilize the extra time. If a child continued to show weakness in math or language arts, the amount of time he or she spent in that class was doubled again, to more than three hours a day. Students were then given locally designed “checkpoint” tests that were linked to state curriculum standards.

Blackwell has not ignored teacher preparation. The school typically spends twice as much time on staff development as most schools with most of the training designed for those who teach gifted and talented students. Teachers also incorporate outside subjects into their classes: Math teachers include writing in their classes; history teachers include science.

According to Reba Cutten, the mother of an eighth grader, the school “didn’t have a very good reputation before. I almost didn’t want to send [my daughter] here when she was younger. When Ms. Blackwell came in, it was a total turnaround.”

To read the entire article, visit:

<http://www.dallasnews.com/localnews/education/stories/092902dnmetschoolswork.bf524.html>



WITH EXIT EXAMS LOOMING, GRADUATION PROBLEMS ABOUND

Across the country, states are ratcheting up standards for high school graduates. In the next few years, almost half of all states will require students to pass exit exams to graduate. Massive numbers of students failing to graduate is a looming fear, but one that remains largely unspoken among teachers, principals, students and parents in states that will soon require exit exams. In New York and California, however, these fears are becoming a reality as hundreds of students struggle to pass these exams.

In New York City, more than 60 percent of last year’s high school seniors could not graduate because they either flunked or failed to take at least one of the required Regents exams. The class of 2002 had to pass four Regents exams: U.S. history and government, global history, math, and English; the class of 2001 only had to pass math and English.

These reports are even more disturbing considering that the passing score was only 55. In 2004, students will have to score 65 or better to pass the English and math exams. The following year, students will have to score 65 or better in five exams—including science.

According to the *Los Angeles Daily News*, the results in California are equally troubling. Fewer than half of the state's 11th graders have passed the state's high-stakes graduation exam after two tries, with more students falling short on the math portion than on English. The statewide goal is for all high school seniors to pass the California High School Exit Exam, beginning with the class of 2004. Students will have six chances to pass the exam before they finish the 12th grade.

While many California educators believe that students are only now beginning to realize the impact of the test, Los Angeles Unified School District superintendent Roy Romer is going a step further. Citing the test results as “an opportunity to leverage change,” Romer announced a multi-step plan that includes adding a 13th year of schooling for failing students. During their 13th year, students would be placed in the district's adult education program with the goal of helping them pass the exam. In a more immediate attack on the problem, high school counselors will begin working immediately to identify students who are still in school and have failed the tests. These students will be placed into remedial math and English classes beginning next semester. Meanwhile, the California Board of Education must revisit the exit exam graduation requirement before Aug. 1, 2003 and decide if 2004 is a realistic goal.

According to *The Sacramento Bee*, the high failure rate has led many parents to file lawsuits against the state's high school exit exam. Meanwhile, interest groups representing minorities “charge that students of color, low-income students and English learners in California are less likely to be taught by the best teachers, to have proper textbooks and to be offered a rigorous curriculum.” They blame this lack of resources as the reason that minority students had such high failure rates the past two years.

Los Angeles Daily News article:

<http://www.dailynews.com/Stories/0,1413,200%257E20954%257E894441,00.html>

The Sacramento Bee article:

<http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/story/4671371p-5689507c.html>



FOCUS ON FLORIDA: Education Takes Center Stage in Florida Governor's Race

During the first in-person debate between Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and Democratic challenger Bill McBride, both candidates repeatedly sought to portray themselves as the best candidate to improve the poor condition of education in the state.

For the last several months, McBride, a parent of two children in public schools, has attacked Gov. Bush on his education record, pointing to the state's 50th place ranking in high school graduation rates. McBride also promised to raise teacher salaries and reduce class size. For his part, Bush counterattacked by insisting taxes would have to be increased to pay for McBride's proposals. He also took the opportunity to take credit for record increases in education spending—increases which, according to McBride, are

Focus on Florida

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meaningless because the governor's figure does not account for inflation or student growth.

One issue at the heart of the debate is a proposed constitutional amendment that would limit school class size. McBride, along with other Democrats, is a huge supporter of an amendment that Bush says would cost too much and lead to higher taxes. According to a poll last week, McBride currently trails Bush by six points. If either candidate expects to draw more support, one can bet that the education issue will be a big factor.



With WorldCom Bankruptcy, MarcoPolo Education Web Site Faces Possible Shutdown

According to an *Education Week* article, 50 states have adopted and more than 180,000 teachers have participated in the Internet educational project, MarcoPolo, that WorldCom and MCI started in 1999 to train over 2.4 million teachers by 2005. However, now that WorldCom has filed for bankruptcy protection, MarcoPolo's training programs may have to be shut down sometime this school year unless they receive additional funding.

MarcoPolo offers teachers free Web-based educational resources and face-to-face training on using the Internet in classroom lessons. The program sites are integrated and can be searched with a common search engine, making it useful for teachers who use an interdisciplinary approach. Each site has some of the best resources its partner sites have to offer and acts as both a gateway site that links individual partner sites and as an educational resource on its own. Partner sites include the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the National Geographic Society, and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Some states have even added MarcoPolo as a professional development program and link it to their state education department Web page.

"I believe so strongly in the program," said Susan DePlatchett, a professional-development coordinator at the University of Maryland's college of education and a MarcoPolo trainer in her state, "that I would be willing to fulfill my commitment to the training on a voluntary basis" she told *Education Week*. Even in the aftermath of WorldCom's bankruptcy, MarcoPolo continues to train teachers. More than 17,000 have benefited from the program since July.

Caleb M. Schutz, who is in charge of MarcoPolo said, "You couldn't have much of a worse climate economically for federal and state government funding . . . or for private foundation funding, which I'm trying to get." Even in the aftermath of WorldCom's bankruptcy, MarcoPolo continues to train teachers—more than 17,000 have benefited from the program since July.

To read the *Education Week* article, visit:

<http://www.edweek.com/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=03marcopolo.h22&keywords=marcopolo>

To read more about MarcoPolo, visit: <http://www.marcopolo-education.org/index.aspx>



HOUSTON SCHOOL DISTRICT RECEIVES NEW NATIONAL AWARD

Last week, the **Broad Foundation** awarded \$500,000 in college scholarships to the Houston Independent School District as part of a new award that recognizes the best large urban school system in the nation. As part of the \$1 million award, the other four finalists, Atlanta Public Schools, Boston Public Schools, Garden Grove Unified School District (CA), and Long Beach Unified School District, will each receive \$125,000 in scholarships.

The Broad Prize for Urban Education is an annual award that honors urban school districts that are making the greatest overall improvement in student achievement while at the same time closing achievement gaps across ethnic groups and between high and low income students.

In Houston, the percentage of elementary school students reaching proficiency increased by 8.3 percent from 1999 to 2001. Meanwhile, middle school students' proficiency increased by 8.8 percent while high school students improved by 5.5 percent during the same period. At the same time, Houston reduced the achievement gap between high and low income students in both reading and math at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

To learn more about the award and Houston's credentials, visit:
<http://www.broadfoundation.org/med-news/index-int.shtml>



CENSUS BUREAU STUDY SAYS POVERTY RATE ON THE RISE

Given the state of the economy and the decline of the stock market, it should not be surprising that incomes in the U.S. are declining and the poverty rate is rising. Findings released by the Commerce Department's Census Bureau highlight the growing number of individuals and families that are struggling to make ends meet. On September 24, the Census Bureau released a report indicating that between 2000 and 2001:

- median household income fell 2.2 percent, and;
- the poverty rate rose from 11.3 percent to 11.7 percent (This represents an increase of 1.3 million poor people.)

For more information, see <http://www.census.gov>

Straight A's: An Update on Public 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 6 million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.