



ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

Straight A's:

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FUND OUR SCHOOLS, KEEP YOUR PROMISE: Education Rally Urges Congress to Pass an Education Spending Bill

Last week, appearing before a multicolored backdrop reading “Fund Our Schools, Keep Your Promise,” a group of parents, teachers, and students joined members of Congress to voice their opposition to a long-term continuing resolution and demand that Congress pass the Labor-HHS-Education spending bill.

The rally was staged by the Committee for Education Funding and featured **Sens. Tom Harkin (D-IA), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Paul Wellstone (D-MN), Jack Reed (D-RI), and Jim Jeffords (I-VT)**. **Reps. Dave Obey (D-WI)**, ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, and **George Miller (D-CA)**, the ranking member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, also attended.

The speakers sympathized with school districts during a time when the federal government has failed to provide sufficient resources to make up for declining state and local resources. They urged Congress to pass the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations at a level that would sufficiently fund the *No Child Left Behind Act* rather than passing a long-term continuing resolution that provides no funding increase in the aggregate over last year's level. At the same time as the federal government is poised to freeze federal funding, state governments are facing declining state revenues. In a report released by Miller and Kennedy the same day, findings show that, when combined, states have cut education spending \$9.1 billion in the last fiscal year, and have cut a total of \$22 billion from higher education and elementary and secondary education over the last two years. (The report, *Education in Crisis: Update on the State Budget Crunch* is available at: <http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/rel10802.html>).

Additional speakers included Laura Wolf, the executive dean of student services at Des Moines Area Community College, Jo'ie Taylor, president of the United States Student Association, and Barry Beauchamp, the superintendent of Lawton Public Schools in Oklahoma. Each of the speakers stressed that their respective institutions could handle a continuing resolution, but students could not. To paraphrase Superintendent Beauchamp, schools have always operated on the premise of “no child left behind,” but without more help from the federal government, some children will likely be left behind.



WITH ELECTIONS LOOMING, CONGRESS LEAVES TOWN AND PREPARES FOR “LAME DUCK” SESSION

Lame duck (lām dŭk) n. An elected official or group continuing to hold political office during the period between the election and the inauguration of a successor (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*).

Last week, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) that would fund government programs through Nov. 22, but also found time to send a \$355.1 billion defense appropriations bill and a \$10.5 billion military construction appropriations bill to President Bush for signature. According to *CQ Weekly*, “The administration appears content to let the rest of government operate at fiscal 2002 levels indefinitely.”

A continuing resolution (CR) is a temporary funding measure that allows Congress additional time to pass spending bills and send them to the President for his signature. Continuing resolutions only fund the programs for which no annual appropriation bill has been signed into law by the President—in this case, everything except defense and military construction. A CR remains in effect until it is superseded by a signed appropriation bill, or until it expires and a new CR is passed.

When Congress returns for a lame duck session near the end of November, it will resume work on the fiscal 2003 appropriations bills. Because Congress has so little time to complete its work before the Thanksgiving holiday, most observers believe that lawmakers will have to pass another CR so programs can continue into December. Congress could then either pass the remaining fiscal 2003 appropriations bills or adopt a long-term continuing resolution, which will last until sometime next year.

A long-term continuing resolution would also affect programs other than education. In an Oct. 3 memo to **House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-IL)**, **House Appropriations Committee Chairman C.W. “Bill” Young (R-FL)** wrote, “A long-term continuing resolution that funds government operations at FY02 levels would have disastrous impacts on the war on terror, homeland security, and other important government responsibilities. It would also be financially irresponsible.”

No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference

The U.S. Department of Education has created a desktop reference guide that offers a straightforward program-by-program look at the major reforms made by the *No Child Left Behind Act*. It also describes how the Act’s four guiding principles (accountability, flexibility and local control, parental choice, and what works). The intent is to provide a substantive overview of policy changes and explain how the *No Child Left Behind Act* affects federal education programs, the responsibilities of state and local school administrators, and our nation’s schoolchildren. Programs for which no funding was requested in fiscal years 2002 and 2003 are not included.

The desktop reference guide is available at:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/reference.html>



EDUCATION TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN UPCOMING STATE AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Despite the fact that education is being ignored in the current appropriations cycle, education is playing an important role as an issue in the upcoming November elections. Nationwide, 12 states will be considering ballot measures that could alter the direction of education within those states for years and many governor's races are hinging on the education issue. Finally, the issue of education could play a major role in the control of the Senate.

In the race for Governor of Florida between **Gov. Jeb Bush** and his democratic challenger **Bill McBride**, the word education is never far from either candidate's lips. Earlier this month, Bush unveiled two new initiatives that will allow Florida teachers to repay college loans at a reduced rate and buy a house with no down payment. All certified teachers regardless of experience would be eligible for the program as long as they remain in the state of Florida.

Florida also has two education initiatives on the ballot for this November. One proposal would create a universal pre-kindergarten program for all four-year olds to be phased in by the 2005-2006 school year. Another measure, Amendment 9, would limit class sizes to 18 students in grades kindergarten through third grade, 22 students in fourth through eighth, and 25 students in grades ninth through 12th grades. According to estimates, the program could cost \$8 billion to \$27 billion.

While McBride and the state's teachers' union support the bill, Bush and many college presidents, the Florida Board of Education, and a school superintendents group believe the cost is too great. For his part, Bush has proposed a \$2.8 billion bond program that would be used to build 12,000 new classrooms in more than 300 new schools over five years.

Meanwhile, 11 other states have some form of education initiative on the ballot. In California, voters will determine the fate of Proposition 47, which would help pay for the construction of new classrooms to relieve overcrowding. The money would also be used to repair older schools and upgrade facilities throughout California's community college and university systems. Californians will also vote on an After-School Education and Safety Program Act that would cost roughly \$400 million a year and provide afterschool grants to elementary and secondary schools.

To learn more about ballot initiatives in other states, visit:
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=07ballot.h22>

To view summaries of the 16 education-related ballot measures on Nov. 5, visit
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=07ballot-s1.h22>

Lights On Afterschool!

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness and advocating for afterschool programs. The organization is supported by a group of public, private and nonprofit organizations that share the goal of ensuring all children have access to afterschool programs by 2010. The Alliance grew out of a public-private partnership with the Mott Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education that expanded afterschool programs through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool program. The federal government provided the grants to the local communities while the Mott Foundation funded public awareness and training activities. These groups came together in 1999 to create the Afterschool Alliance.

Every year the Afterschool Alliance heads an event called *Lights on Afterschool* which seeks to rally support for afterschool programs all around the country. This year the event took place on October 10 and highlighted programs at over 5,000 sites and 1, 200 communities. A half a million Americans participated in these rallies. Actor and youth advocate Arnold Schwarzenegger served as chair of the event for the second year in a row. “*Lights on Afterschool!* is about keeping our kids safe and helping them succeed in school and in life,” says Schwarzenegger. Schwarzenegger is also the lead sponsor of a California ballot initiative to boost spending on afterschool programs, Proposition 49.

To learn more about the Afterschool Alliance, visit: <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/>

Education Should Play a Large Part in Southern Senate Races

In an article for the *Washington Post*, David Broder writes that House and Senate races in the South, and the issue of education in particular, will play a large role in determining which political party will control Congress, after the election.

Broder describes the revolution in southern politics, which has roots in the 1960s, that helped give rise to what he calls a “50-50 America.” He cites Lyndon Johnson’s civil rights agenda, Richard Nixon’s southern strategy, and the “Contract with America” that led to Republican control of the House and Senate in 1994 as key moments in the revolution. According to Broder, “it was the emergence of a competitive and at times dominant Republican party in the South that created this era’s political map. Now, for both parties, the South looms so large in the fight for national advantage that every race in the region becomes a coveted prize.”

This year, it appears that education will play a key role in these southern races. Broder notes that every Democratic governor in the region “has made education the centerpiece of his agenda” and that Democrats “have benefited most from the public focus on the issue—partly because they seized on it first, and partly because they have been willing to spend money on schools.”

As Donald Fowler, the veteran Democratic Party leader in South Carolina, told Broder: “There is a consciousness on the part of southerners that we are still behind the rest of the country, and the only way we’re going to make it up is through education. That is true of most blacks, but also of many middle-class whites.”

Warren Tompkins, a Republican consultant, agreed on the importance of the education issue: “Education at the state level is like Social Security and Medicare in a federal race. We may not be able to win on the issue, but we have to be able to hold our own to have a chance.”

Specifically, Broder points to the race between **Rep. Lindsey Graham** and Alex Sanders, the president of the College of Charleston for the seat of **Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC)**. Sanders has made his education background a centerpiece of his campaign. Meanwhile, Graham was able to persuade House Republican leaders to schedule a vote on his teacher loan forgiveness bill which passed a few weeks ago.

Meanwhile, another important Senate race is in New Hampshire where **Rep. John E. Sununu (R-NH)** is squaring off against **Democratic Gov. Jeanne Shaheen**. In a recent community forum, the candidates traded punches on the issue of education with Shaheen criticizing Sununu’s record on education. For his part, Sununu said that no one in New Hampshire believes that the State’s education funding crisis has been solved during Shaheen’s term as governor.

To read the entire David Broder article, visit:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16851-2002Oct12.html>



TEACHING FELLOWS ACT: Senate Bill Would Offer Tuition Assistance and Teaching Scholarships to Promote Careers in Education

Earlier this month, **Sens. Richard Lugar (R-IN)** and **Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)** introduced legislation that would encourage students to undertake a career in education. The Teaching Fellows Act of 2002, S. 3080 would create two programs that would offer tuition assistance and teaching scholarships to participants.

The first part of the bill would provide a teaching scholarship that students could apply for after their senior year of high school or their second year of college. Selected students would receive at least \$6,500 per year toward college expenses in return for teaching five years in a low-performing school in their state after graduation. The second program would provide grants to people already in the education community—such as teaching assistants—for the additional schooling necessary to receive a four-year degree and a teaching certification.

In its report, *Every Child a Graduate*, the Alliance for Excellent Education made the case for a similar program that would use federal funds to recruit college juniors with a 3.4 grade point average or higher in their major to teach in high-poverty schools. Students would receive up to \$20,000 over two years in grants to help them complete their studies and become certified to teach in their major.

“It is estimated that 1 million of the nation's 3 million teachers will retire in the next five years,” said Lugar. “Schools will need to hire over 2 million new teachers in the next decade. The Teaching Fellows Act would create two programs to encourage the best and brightest to enter and remain in the teaching profession.”

Teaching Fellows Act

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While the bill isn't likely to see floor action before Congress adjourns for the year, Sen. Bingaman hopes to include a version of the bill as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act next year.

OERI IS A-OK: Education Bill Sent to President for Approval

Last week Congress passed a bill to reauthorize the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and sent it to President Bush for his signature. Under the new bill, the *Education Sciences Reform Act*, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement will be replaced by an Academy of Educational Sciences. The legislation also creates three separate centers under the academy—one for research, one for evaluation, and one for statistics.

Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE), the Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman and author of the legislation, said the new bill “addresses what [he has] come to know as serious shortcomings in the field of education research, including the funding and dissemination of questionable studies, programs, and practices, and an overly bureaucratic office with no real sense of mission.”



TENNESSEE COURT RULES THAT STATE MUST CLOSE TEACHER SALARY DISPARITY

According to a recent decision by the state Supreme Court, Tennessee must find a more equitable way to pay teachers and reduce the wide disparity that exists between low-income, rural districts and better financed urban and suburban districts. Currently, teachers in low-income districts can make \$12,000 or \$14,000 per year more simply by driving across county or state lines.

In a decision that could cost the state up to \$450 million, the court determined that low-income districts could not recruit and retain well-qualified teachers, and therefore could not provide the equal educational opportunities required by the Tennessee constitution. Under the current system, low-income school districts receive supplements based on the 1993 average teacher salary of \$28,094 to help remain competitive, according to *Education Week*. Meanwhile, the Tennessee's current average salary is closer to \$38,000—a \$10,000 difference.

Like many other states around the country, Tennessee's budget is very tight. Over the last three years, the state has resorted to borrowing from future budgets and raiding the tobacco settlement fund to balance the budget. In spite of these accommodations, the state legislature still had to pass an increase in the state's sales and business taxes to end a three-day government shutdown. Both candidates for governor, **Rep. Van Hilleary (R-TN)** and Phil Bredesen, a former mayor of Nashville, remain in opposition to an income tax increase, or any other form of tax increase, leaving the question of funding the court decision up in the air.

To read the *Education Week* article, visit:

<http://www.edweek.com/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=07tenn.h22>



FOREVER LINKED: Examining the Connection Between Exit Exams and Dropout Rates

In an Oct. 9 article for the *New York Times*, Richard Rothstein argues that the country has been so focused on raising standards and improving test scores that it has ignored a 4 percent increase in the high school dropout rate from 26 percent in 1990 to 30 percent in 2000. He suggests that states might want to back off the throttle and lower standards, or perhaps offer extra help to students most likely to drop out, until a reason for the decline in high school graduates is apparent.

In Massachusetts, members of the state Board of Higher Education have already held meetings to plan alternate routes for students who fail the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), but who want to attend community college.

According to the *Boston Globe*, roughly 12,000 students from the class of 2003 have yet to pass both the English and math portions of the 10th-grade exam required to graduate. Concerned by such a high rate of failure, Education Commissioner David Driscoll has suggested a “certificate of achievement” for students who have failed the MCAS test, but have met other graduation requirements. Driscoll’s suggestion comes partly out of concern that students could lose access to federal financial aid without a diploma.

Meanwhile, educators in Minnesota are breathing a sigh of relief after a study by the University of Minnesota’s Office of Educational Accountability found that the state’s dropout rate had remained unchanged since the advent of a state exit exam. The state graduation rate in 2000 was 79 percent, essentially the same percentage as in the previous three years. Only students who do not speak English at home and Twin Cities suburban students showed significantly lower graduation rates than before.

A recent study by the U.S. Census Bureau found that non-English speaking students across the nation faced difficulty graduating. As a result, many dropped out, or never enrolled in high school. The report found that the number of Hispanics who dropped out or never attended high school grew by 50 percent in the 1990s. The southern and western parts of the United States, where many schools struggled to accommodate fast-growing Spanish populations, were most affected by this trend.

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.