



ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

Straight A's:

An Update on Public Education: Policy and Progress

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ELECTION WRAP-UP: American Voters Elect a Republican Senate, Support Education Ballot Initiatives Across the Country

On Wednesday, Nov. 6, Americans awoke to election returns that gave control of the U.S. Senate to the Republican party. While most national elections seemed to hinge on the President's popularity, homeland security and a possible war with Iraq, voters showed that the issue of education is still one of their top concerns by supporting successful education ballot initiatives across the country. In a result that speaks volumes about voters' commitment to the issue of education, voters in state after state approved education initiatives during a time when most states are facing a budget deficit and no clear additional sources of revenue are in sight.

The most remarkable example of the education issue's appeal among voters was in Florida where voters approved an amendment to the state constitution that restricts school class size while re-electing **Gov. Jeb Bush**, a staunch opponent of the amendment. During the gubernatorial race, Bush campaigned actively against the amendment, saying that its \$27 billion cost would eat up a majority of Florida's budget. When asked by NBC's Tom Brokaw how he might pay for the class-size initiative, Bush responded: "Well, you either have to cut spending, or you have to increase taxes, and that's a dilemma that I posed to the people of the state." By 2010, the amendment requires that Florida's classrooms be limited to 18 children in pre-kindergarten through third grade, 22 children in grades four through eight, and 25 children in high school classes. Voters in Florida also adopted constitutional amendments that would require universal pre-kindergarten by the 2005-06 school year.

In California, voters approved the largest bond ever, a \$13.05 billion bond for crowded and rundown public schools in spite of a more than \$20 billion budget deficit. School districts can also use the money to upgrade wiring for computers and bring Internet access to those classrooms that are currently without. Specifically, the bond would provide \$11.4 billion for kindergarten through 12th-grade facilities, and \$1.65 billion for higher-education facilities. Of the total, more than \$6 billion were allocated expressly for construction of new facilities. The ultimate cost of the bonds, repaid over 30 years, is projected to be about \$26 billion. Payment for principal and interest is estimated at \$873 million a year.

Election Wrapup

(Continued from p. 1)

Despite the record size of the bond, state legislators believed it still would not be enough. It has been estimated that the state will need 46,000 new classrooms in the next five years to relieve overcrowding. Toward that end, a second measure for a \$12.3 billion bond will be on the ballot in 2004.

In Houston, voters approved a \$808.6 million bond issue that would largely rebuild and renovate deteriorating schools within the Houston Independent School District (HISD). The bond proposal is the second of three that HISD officials say they need to bring all the district's nearly 300 schools up to standard. The bond's success comes just a few weeks after Houston received \$500,000 in college scholarships from the Broad Foundation as part of a new award that recognizes the best large urban school system in the nation.

For a complete list of education ballot measures, visit:

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=11ballot.h22>



ELECTION PRODUCES CHANGES IN COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND PARTY LEADERSHIP

As a result of Republican wins in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, several changes are forthcoming in the makeup of party leadership and Committee Chairmen. The Republican party now holds at least 51 seats, a two-seat majority and a net gain of three seats in the Senate. The control of the seat currently held by **Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA)** will be decided in a run-off election between Landrieu and Republican Suzanne Terrell in December. In the House, Republican will control at least 228 seats, only two less than when they were first swept into power by the "Contract with America" platform.

The most dramatic change in makeup is found in the Senate where **Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS)**, will act as majority leader. Lott has pledged to adopt a more collegial, cooperative style in his role as majority leader. **Sen. Tom Daschle (D-SD)** will return to his role as minority leader. In the House, **Rep. Dennis Hastert (R-IL)** will remain speaker of the house while **Rep. Tom DeLay (R-TX)** will take over for retiring **Rep. Dick Armey (R-TX)**. On the Democratic side of the aisle, the shakeup was more pronounced. Relinquishing the minority leader post he had held since 1989, **Rep. Richard A. Gephardt (D-MO)** will be replaced by **Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)**. Pelosi, who previously served as minority whip, is the first woman in either the House or Senate to hold such a high leadership position.

Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) will preside over the Senate Appropriations Committee and is considered to be similar in style to outgoing chairman **Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-WV)**. According to *CQ Weekly*, "Both take a bipartisan approach to moving appropriations legislation, and they are passionate defenders of congressional spending prerogatives." Stevens, along with every Republican on the committee, supported then-chairman Byrd's

\$769 billion funding ceiling for this year's total appropriation, a number \$20 billion more than the President requested. However, from 1997 to 2001, the last time Stevens presided over the committee, he produced spending bills in line with the tight levels imposed by the Republican budget resolutions.

Taking over for outgoing chairmen **Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA)**, **Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH)** will now control the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. Gregg is one of the more conservative senators on the HELP Committee, but has been more than willing to work with Kennedy on many education issues, including the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

During the new Congress, the HELP Committee is expected to begin work on the reauthorization of several important education programs, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including the Higher Education Act, the Head Start pre-school program, and the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. Gregg told *Education Week* that he and Sen. Kennedy were "reasonably close to an agreement on IDEA before the break" and hopes that they can "pick that up and continue it."

Sen. Don Nickles (R-OK) is expected to become the new chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, taking over the helm from **Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND)**. During this session of Congress, Sen. Conrad included a \$5.4 billion increase over the President's budget request for education programs. Sen. Nickles, on the other hand, is a well-known fiscal conservative and might be "even more aggressive than the White House in seeking to restrain non-defense spending in the fiscal 2004 budget," according to *CQ Weekly*.

Outlook for Education in the New Congress

For education, the most dramatic impact will most likely be felt in education spending. When the Democrats held a majority in the Senate, they often set the higher spending number for education programs in negotiations with the House and the President.

For the next two years, it appears that members of the House and Senate will be taking their spending cues from President Bush. Just weeks after the election, the President's influence over spending levels is already apparent. On Nov. 15 House Appropriations Committee Chairman Young and his Senate counterpart Stevens met with President Bush. At the meeting, Bush reiterated his wish that Congress stick close to his fiscal 2003 budget request of about \$750 billion.

After the meeting, Congress passed a continuing resolution that would fund the federal government at existing levels until January 11, 2003. This move allows Republican leaders to put off work on unfinished spending bills until they control both chambers of Congress. The spending measure passed 270-143.

In addition to continuing government operations, the resolution provides \$500 million for the creation of a Homeland Security Department and gives the administration the authority to transfer an additional \$140 million from unobligated balances in other

Outlook for Education in the New Congress

(Continued from p. 3)

accounts to the new department. It also extends some welfare benefits into next year, but would not provide additional highway or education money sought by many members.

When Congress returns in January, members plan to try to quickly clear up the spending impasse. After the Republican takeover in the Senate and further gains in the House, Democrats are in a much weaker position to challenge the White House. In the words of **Rep. David Obey (D-WI)**, top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, “If the country elected a Republican Congress, then they have to expect to get a Republican budget.”

In an article for the *New York Times*, Diana Jean Schemo writes the Republican party also expects to expand some of the key themes of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, most notably, an increased emphasis on tracking the success or failure of educational programs through standardized testing and increased accountability for schools. According to Schemo, Congress is likely to maintain its insistence on results and accountability when it begins work on the reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The complete article can be found at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/10/politics/10EDU.html>

New Members Bring Education Credentials: A Partial List

Several new members of the 108th Congress have education backgrounds, including a university dean, college professor, or high school teacher. In addition, other new members who may not have an education background made education a prominent issue in their campaigns.

Perhaps the most well-known member-elect among the education community, **Sen.-elect Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** served as U.S. Secretary of Education to former-President George H.W. Bush. During his campaign, Alexander touted a program from his days in the Cabinet called the “G.I. Bill for Kids,” a school voucher proposal that would give \$250 “scholarships” to allow middle-income and low-income children to attend any accredited school.

Considered a shoo-in to replace his mother, retiring **Rep. Carrie Meek, Rep.-elect Kendrick Meek (D-FL)** spent a great deal of his campaign working to ensure the passage of Florida’s class-size reduction initiative. While serving in the state Senate, **Rep.-elect Chris Van Hollen (D-MD)** was well-known for his strategy for bringing plenty of education dollars to his home county. A former law professor, **Rep.-elect Frank Balance Jr. (D-NC)**, has said that education will be his top priority, with a particular focus on reducing class size and recruiting better teachers in particular.

A complete list of new members and their profiles can be found at:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/elections/2002/newmembers.htm>



STATE BUDGET CUTS CONTINUE TO AFFECT EDUCATION: Colorado Education Officials Told to Expect Funding Cuts

In mid-November, the school finance chief for the Colorado Department of Education warned Colorado school districts that mid-year budget cuts in education are very possible as the state struggles to eliminate a \$388 million shortfall. Jefferson public schools chief financial officer Ken Hoover told the *Rocky Mountain News* that his district has been told to expect a 1 to 2 percent cut in funding. Each 1 percent equals approximately \$4.5 million.

While no cuts will be made until after state lawmakers convene in January, districts are preparing for the worst. Funding for K through 12 schools is roughly 40 percent of the state's general fund—that's \$2.5 billion, or an increase of 7.5 percent over the previous year. If K through 12 education funding is left out of cuts, some estimates show that other areas of the state's general fund would have to be cut by up to 15 percent. At the same time, Amendment 23, the constitutional change requiring that state school funding increase annually by inflation plus 1 percentage point, will probably play a big part in the debate over cutting funding and whether the amendment prohibits any cuts in education funding.

For more information, visit:

http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/education/article/0,1299,DRMN_957_1540157,00.html



NEW YORK CITY MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES NEW TWEED ACADEMY

New York City Mayor Michael B. Bloomberg and **Chancellor Joel I. Klein** recently announced plans for the new Tweed Academy. It will act as a first-rate educational center that aims to promote literacy among all students. During traditional school hours, elementary and middle school classes from all of New York City's five boroughs will participate in alternating two-week intensive academic "residencies" at the Academy.

Tweed Academy will open in the spring semester of 2003 and will eventually serve about 200 elementary and middle school students each school day. Students will study the historical, scientific, and governmental aspects of New York City, and the instruction of literacy will be paramount across all disciplines. The elementary school program will be designed for third graders, while the middle school program will cater to seventh graders. During the afternoon, the academy will conduct educational programs for high school students and teachers. The academy will also be a center of professional development for teachers to ease the transfer of best practices into all classrooms throughout the City.



REP. JACKSON TOUTS EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT: Constitutional Amendment Would Ensure Quality Education for All Students

In a recent speech at Brown University, **Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-IL)** made his case for a constitutional amendment that would guarantee quality public education and health care for every United States citizen.

He said a lack of quality public education and health care is a nationwide problem: “Poor white Appalachians need a public education of equal, high quality. African-Americans in the urban cities and the ghettos of our nation need a public education of equal, high quality. The Hispanics in the barrios of our nation need a public education of equal, high quality.”

After being pressed on the cost of his amendment by reporters during a question-and-answer session, Jackson provided no specific dollar amounts, saying such costs are difficult to determine. However, he said the country always seems to find the money to fund something it considers a priority, citing the nation’s response to the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks, but he also looked at the cost of not having a public education:

When you the question of cost, there is another question that, I think, precedes that one: ‘What are the costs of not having a high-quality public education?’ We are paying for it in lack of productivity. We are paying for it in terms of the prison population. We are paying for it in terms of not guaranteeing every American a true equal opportunity.

Jackson’s amendment would guarantee minimum standards for public education—not take resources from one community and give them to another. While the Supreme Court would ultimately determine what constitutes a “high-quality” education, Jackson says that every student should have access to computers, well-trained teachers, and small class sizes.



ONLY 69 PERCENT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GRADUATE: New Report Examines Graduation Rates for All 50 States

A new report, *Public School Graduation Rates in the United States*, by Jay Greene of the **Manhattan Institute** examines high school graduation rates by state and found that the national graduation rate for the public school class of 2000 was 69 percent, up one percentage point from last year. The rate for white students was 76 percent; for Asian students it was 79 percent; for African-American students it was 55 percent; for Hispanic students it was 53 percent.

The new report builds upon a previous report, *High School Graduation Rates in the United States*, that Greene used to introduce. The “Greene Method” calculates graduation rates simply and with reasonable accuracy. The calculation is now widely

used by policymakers and compares the number of students who enter a high school class to the number of students receiving a regular diploma.

According to the report, New Jersey (87 percent), South Dakota (86 percent), and Utah (86 percent) had the nation's highest graduation rates. On the other end of the spectrum, Georgia (56 percent) and Florida (55 percent) had the lowest graduation rate. South Dakota, with an increase of 10 percentage points and New Jersey, with a 9 percentage point increase, had the largest increases from 1998 to 2000.

According to the *2001 Digest of Education Statistics*, students who drop out or do not go on to postsecondary education have significantly lower annual and lifetime earnings than those who continue their education. Assuming that each works until age 65 and earns the average salary, a male high school graduate will earn nearly \$333,000 more than a dropout, and a worker with some college will earn \$538,000 more. A male with a college degree will earn almost a million (\$945,670) more than the high school dropout.

Both reports are available at: <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/>

Superintendent Receives \$25,000 Bonus for Closing Student Achievement Gap

Last week, the Houston Independent School District (HISD) trustees voted unanimously to give the maximum bonus, \$25,000, to Superintendent Kaye Stripling because of the district's progress toward closing the achievement gap between white students and minority and economically disadvantaged students.

Stripling's contract stipulates that she will receive a certain dollar amount, a total not to exceed \$25,000, for each one-tenth of a percentage point that the achievement gap is reduced. According to district information, the achievement gap narrowed by 2.235 percent.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/story.hts/metropolitan/1671116>

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.