



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress

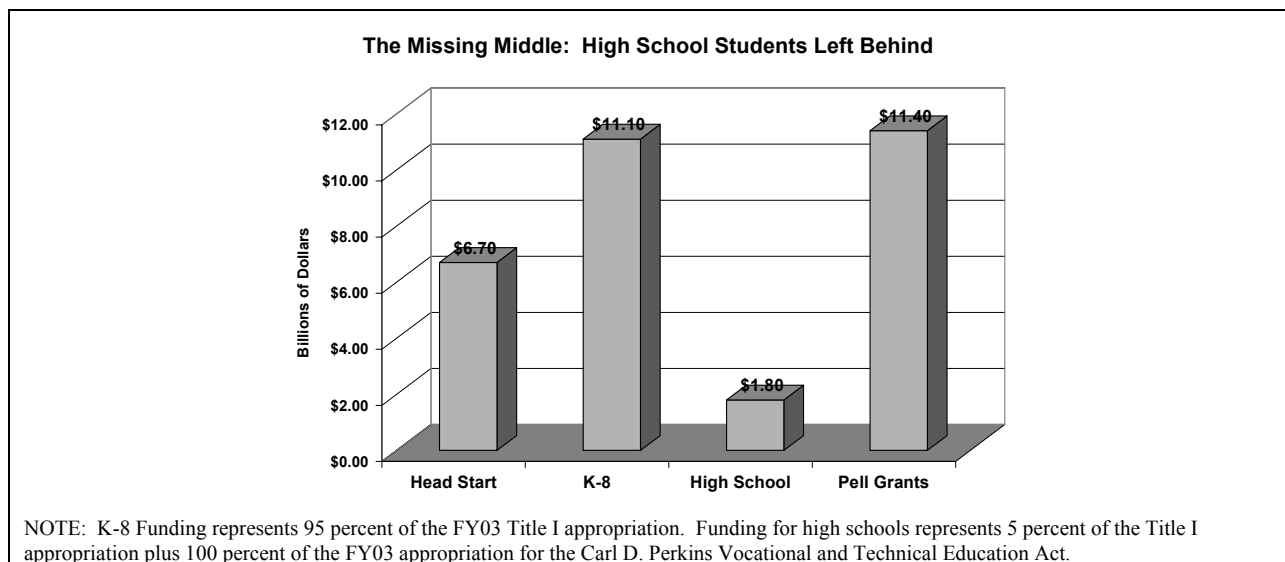


GRADUATION FOR ALL: House Bill Promotes Student Graduation Plan and Adolescent Literacy to Combat High Dropout Rates

In an effort to raise embarrassingly low graduation rates in the nation's high schools, a new bill in the House of Representatives authorizes \$1 billion in federal funding for schools to increase literacy rates and implement individual graduation plans for students most at risk of dropping out of high school. H.R. 3085, the *Graduation For All Act*, introduced by **Reps. Susan Davis (D-CA)** and **Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX)**, would provide funds for schools to hire literacy coaches who would train teachers across the curriculum to incorporate research-based literacy instruction into their teaching.

“Most dropouts read below the ninth-grade level,” said Davis. “Research has shown that focused literacy instruction will help students graduate from high school—and attend college. They will become productive workers, have better lives, and contribute to the economy as well. When every adolescent reads well, everyone wins.”

The *Graduation for All Act* is especially important because it would help fill a gap in federal policy for students in secondary schools. Even though middle and high schools educate 33 percent of students, high schools only receive 5 percent of federal education funding for K-12. As the following graph illustrates, middle schools and high schools are the “missing middle” when it comes to federal policy and funding for education programs. By adding a new funding stream for middle and high schools, the federal government can become a partner with states and local school districts in addressing today's alarming 30 percent dropout rate.



Graduation for All

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The federal government currently funds reading programs for K-3 students and for adults, but the nation's middle and high school students are falling through the cracks. On the most recent National Assessment of Education Progress, 25 percent of students in eighth grade scored below basic in reading. Overall, while fourth-graders had a higher average scale score in 2002 than in 1998, eighth-graders showed no improvement, and 12th-graders actually showed a decline in performance between 1998 and 2002.

Without a focus on literacy instruction at the high school level, many of these students are left to drift through high school, often faking their way through reading assignments. Even worse, some students drop out altogether. Even students who manage to graduate from high school sometimes find themselves enrolled in remedial courses upon entering postsecondary education. Among students who attended high-minority-enrollment secondary schools, the enrollment rate in remedial courses is an astounding 40 percent.

The *Graduation for All Act* would target funding to schools with the lowest graduation rates and allow them to hire one literacy coach for every 600 students. Literacy coaches would not only work with students, but also with teachers across the curriculum. After all, if a student cannot read and comprehend his history textbook, how is he expected to succeed in the course?

Like the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the bill contains accountability provisions that require states and school districts to disaggregate graduation rates by race, ethnicity, income, disability status, and limited English proficiency status. States must also set annual measurable objectives for improving graduation rates. In an effort to control reporting options that tend to make graduation rates look higher than they are, the bill also requires school districts to report the number of high school-age youth who have left school, but are enrolled in adult education or other GED programs.

In an article for *The Providence Journal*, education consultant Julia Steiny discusses the “numbers game” that many school districts are playing in an effort to keep their dropout rate to a minimum. She says the Enron-like manipulation of the dropout figures in Houston and New York City are the combined result of “much sloppiness as well as deliberate and brazen miscoding, and the white lie of counting students who get a GED as non-dropouts. Schools have less than no incentive to invest the significant leg work it would take to get an accurate count.”

Currently, the *Graduation for All Act* has 21 cosponsors: **Reps. Anibal Acevedo-Vila (D-PR), Xavier Becerra (D-CA), Dennis Cardoza (D-CA), Ed Case (D-HI), Bob Etheridge (D-NC), Martin Frost (D-TX), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Major Owens (D-NY), Silvestre Reyes (D-TX), Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX), Linda Sanchez (D-CA), Jose Serrano (D-NY), Hilda Solis (D-CA), John Spratt, Jr. (D-SC), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Lynn Woolsey (D-CA).**

Numbers Game Leaves Many Behind:

http://www.projo.com/opinion/contributors/content/projo_20030928_edwatch28.2cfd.html

Case Study—*Adolescent Literacy Initiative* Chicago Reading Initiative – Chicago, IL

Educators and decision makers across the nation are realizing the importance that literacy plays in a child's ability to succeed in life. Chicago Public School (CPS) CEO Arne Duncan has made improving literacy a district priority, establishing Chicago Reading Initiative, a uniform instructional framework across the curriculum. The goal is to reform low-performing schools by implementing the CPS Reading Framework, which requires teachers to teach reading for two hours daily and use evidence-based strategies. The Framework also calls for literacy specialists to work with teachers to incorporate word knowledge, comprehension, writing, and reading fluency into their subject area curriculum.

The Chicago Reading Initiative is a two-year plan with the goal of ensuring that all students have access to high quality instruction in reading. The first year of the initiative, 2001-2002, targeted the 114 lowest achieving elementary schools in the district and focused on dissemination of training materials and professional development for school staff and leadership. All principals received training and materials in the reading framework, all K-3rd grade classrooms received grade-appropriate classroom libraries, and highly qualified reading specialists were assigned to each of the elementary schools. These specialists received ongoing training, coaching, and mentoring through out the year.

Building on the success of the elementary program, the reading initiative entered high schools in the 2002-2003 academic year. Each high school created a literacy team, comprised of core subject teachers (one from each department), a special education teacher, and the school's principal or assistant principal. Over the course of the academic year, these teams received a total of 40 hours of professional development from Literacy Specialists. The professional development sessions include demonstrations of classroom strategies, small group and individual mentoring/coaching sessions, assessment of student progress, and data interpretation.

The Chicago Reading Initiative is scheduled to continue for the 2003-2004 school year, with 160 reading specialists assigned to the bottom quartile elementary schools, over 1,200 teachers participating in Summer Reading Professional Development Program, and training for over 450 high school teachers to implement reading in the four core subject areas.

More information on the Chicago Reading Initiative, as well as over 70 other case studies in adolescent literacy, college preparation, smaller learning communities, and teacher and principal quality are available on the Alliance Web site at: <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/CaseStudies.html>.



IN THE LINE OF FIRE: Mayors Move to the Forefront in Education Reform

In the two-plus years since the *No Child Left Behind Act* became law, the word “accountability” has found its way into nearly every conversation about education from Miami to Seattle. However, the people likely to be among the first to be held accountable during election time are not the principals or the school superintendents, but elected officials such as mayors in cities throughout the country. At the local level, teachers, principals, and, in most cases, superintendents do not hold elected positions. At the state and national level, voters concern themselves with a myriad of issues, of which education is just one. U.S. mayors, however, are in a unique position of being directly accountable for the status of education in the community, and possessing the tools and resources that allow them to improve student achievement.

Over the last several years, mayors in large cities like Chicago, Boston, and New York City have made national headlines for taking direct control of their city's school system. Meanwhile,

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mayors in other cities throughout the country have been able to use their role as chief executive to bring together diverse interests within their communities in an effort to make a significant impact on education in their cities.

In “Takeovers or Toeholds,” a commentary in *Education Week*, **Fritz Edelstein, the senior adviser at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and J.D. LaRock, a Presidential fellow at Harvard University’s graduate school of education**, highlight several areas from school safety to higher education in which mayors have been able to exert a significant amount of influence on education-related initiatives in their cities. They stress that in order for mayors to successfully involve themselves in education, they need not assume more authority over the school system. Mayors should just use the authority they already possess in a constructive manner.

One of the ways mayors are impacting education in their communities is by using the resources directly under their control. In many cities, mayors have authority over youth-development and recreation agencies, and have used their power to focus on after-school and out-of-school programs. For example, working with the city’s community college, Urban League chapter, and school district, **Tulsa, Okla., Mayor Bill LaFortune** has created a summer youth academy that works to improve literacy.

In his role as chief executive, the mayor also has the power of the bully pulpit to raise public awareness and drive community action on areas beyond his direct control. In Birmingham, Ala., for instance, **Mayor Tom Kincaid** was able to command public support for a \$168 million school bond issue that will go toward school construction and repair. Over the years, **Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels**, building on the work of his predecessors, has secured and maintained the city’s Families and Education Levy, a \$69 million initiative that supports over 20 programs, including early childhood intervention, health care, and other services that work to remove barriers that hinder effective student learning.

In today’s environment of state budget shortfalls and tight economies, mayors realize that their ability to improve education results affects not only parents and students, but also businesses and institutions of higher learning. A recent article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* highlighted a report released by **Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy** that found 54 percent of the city’s public school students cannot read at grade level. It also noted that a study from one year ago found that 43 percent of all high school seniors in southwestern Pennsylvania “read so poorly that they could be limited to jobs that pay less than \$20,000 a year.” According to **Ronnie L. Byrant, president and chief operating officer of the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance**, the ramifications of poor academic achievement extend beyond the doors of the schoolhouse and ultimately affect business and the economy. “When companies look to move into an area, they look at not just the city, but the region overall,” he told the newspaper. “If you have a school district that . . . is struggling, it has an impact on everyone.”

To achieve much more dramatic results, a mayor will sometimes take on additional authority over educational activities. In Indianapolis, **Mayor Bart Peterson** is the only mayor who has received the authority from a state legislature to authorize charter schools in a city. **Boston**

Mayor Thomas Menino, one of the first mayors to fully involve himself in education, received authority to select the school superintendent and the school board. In much more historic move, **New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg** was given near-total control over New York City's vast public school system, a change from the past when the school board was elected or appointed to control the city's 1,200 schools.

In their article, Edelstein and LaRock also discuss a mayor's ability to "showcase education" and call attention to outstanding schools and students. "Scores of mayors visit schools regularly, giving awards to exemplary students and teachers as they go," they write. It is quite possible, especially in small towns across the country, that the mayor will be the highest-ranking public official that some of these kids ever meet. Who can predict the impact that a visit from the mayor will have on a child's determination to succeed in the years to come? In these visits, the authors argue, "Mayors are recognizing the importance of enhancing pride in public education—and increasing public engagement in the process."

Read the complete "Takeovers or Toeholds?" article at:
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=05edelstein.h23>

Read the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article, "Ripple from City Schools Report Spread Far," at:
<http://www.post-gazette.com/localnews/20030928schools0928p3.asp>

New Mexico Voters Grant Governor New Powers Over Education

In New Mexico, **Gov. Bill Richardson (D)** followed the lead set by his mayoral colleagues throughout the country when he asked voters across the state to grant him new powers over the state's schools. In a special election last month, he got his wish when voters passed a constitutional amendment that created a governor-appointed cabinet-level position for a Secretary of Education. Voters also approved an amendment that would increase education funding by allowing for higher rates of withdrawal from the Land Grant Permanent Fund, which consists of income from oil, gas and mineral royalties, and includes the Permanent Schools Fund. In 2005, this will result in an additional \$78 million for New Mexico schools.

While campaigning for the two amendments, Gov. Richardson said that New Mexicans could not afford to wait for improvements to the school system. "As I traveled across the state and visited dozens of schools, I heard loud and clear from parents and teachers who demanded New Mexico's schools improve," he said after the amendments' passage. "This generation of New Mexicans deserves the best schools and now, with this victory, they will finally get what they asked for."

With the passage of both amendments, Gov. Richardson has the additional funding for education that he sought, as well as greater control and accountability for the school system as a whole. However, he also realizes that he is ultimately responsible for the system's success. The Secretary of Education, he says, will provide "real accountability for our educational system—and [ensure] that for the first time, the buck stops with one person, the governor. I will make sure dollars go into the classroom and not into administration."

The *Albuquerque Journal* provides additional coverage of the New Mexico vote at:
<http://www.abqjournal.com/elex/apgov09-26-03.htm>



ONE IN THREE NOT ‘COLLEGE READY’: Report Finds Two-Thirds of All High School Graduates Are Not Prepared for College

A new report based on data from the U.S. Department of Education finds that only 70 percent of all high school students graduate on time and only 32 percent leave high school “college ready.” *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States*, the latest report from **Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute**, expands upon his findings about low graduation rates throughout the country and examines the number of high school graduates from the class of 2001 who actually possess the minimum qualifications to apply to four-year colleges.

According to Green, a student must meet three criteria to be considered “college ready.” He or she must graduate from high school, must take certain courses in high school that colleges require for the acquisition of necessary skills, and must be able to demonstrate basic literacy skills. While only 32 percent of all students meet these requirements, the results for minority students are even more dismal.

	Graduation Rate	“College Ready” Rate
Total Students	70%	32%
Asian	79%	38%
White	72%	37%
American Indian	54%	14%
Hispanic	52%	16%
African-American	51%	20%

Source: *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States*

The state with the highest graduation rate in the nation was North Dakota (89 percent), and the state with the lowest graduation rate was Florida (56 percent). The state with the highest college-readiness rate was West Virginia (49 percent), while the state with the lowest college-readiness rate was Nevada (22 percent).

The complete report is available from the Manhattan Institute at:
http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_03.htm#01



NOT MAKING THE GRADE: School Buildings Receive a “D-” from Civil Engineers

The American Society of Civil Engineers awarded a D- grade to America’s school buildings and found that 75 percent of the nation’s schools are inadequate to meet the needs of students. The report, an update of the Society’s 2001 *Report Card for America’s Infrastructure*, grades the condition of 12 key areas of American infrastructure and finds that the cost to make necessary improvements for schools remains at more than \$127 billion, despite increased spending on school construction since 2001.

The report cites aging, outdated facilities, severe overcrowding, and new mandated class sizes as some of the factors that contribute to the poor condition in which we find many of our schools. It pegs the per student cost for needed capital investment at \$3,800, which represents more than

half of the average per pupil annual expenditure on education in the United States. As a remedy, the report urges Congress to enact the *America's Better Classroom Act of 2003*, H.R. 930 and S. 856, introduced by **Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (D-CT)** and **Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV)**, respectively. The bills would help states and school districts pay the interest on school modernization bonds through the use of tax credits.

The complete report is available at: <http://www.asce.org/reportcard/pdf/fullreport03.pdf>

For an overall argument on the importance of needed improvements in America's infrastructure vis-à-vis the supplemental spending bill for military operations and the reconstruction of Iraq, read "A Debt We Can Afford," a *Washington Post* Op-Ed by Felix G. Rohatyn at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A48565-2003Oct5.html>

Building a Legacy of Achievement: Columbus, Ohio to Spend \$521 Million on School Construction and Renovation

Last year, in Columbus, Ohio, residents took responsibility for the condition of their school buildings upon themselves when they voted to approve a plan that would modernize 38 Columbus public school buildings over the next seven years. Under the plan, 26 new schools will be built, 12 will be renovated, and two schools will be closed. Planning and work is also beginning on much-needed repairs to over 50 school buildings. In total, the city has pledged to invest \$521 million over the next seven years in a move that will benefit more than 17,000 students.

In an effort to build support for the project and involve the communities in its planning stages, KidsOhio.org has created a community guide to the Columbus public schools "Building a Legacy of Achievement." The guidebook contains information on future planning sessions and provides contact information for those individuals and businesses that want to get involved. It also links to information on the facility master plan, including enrollment projections and construction timelines.

The complete guidebook is available at: <http://www.kidsohio.org/>



SPEAK UP DAY: Online Event Allows Students to Share Thoughts and Ideas on Technology in Schools

What do students think about using technology and the Internet in schools? On October 29, we hope to find out when **NetDay** hosts "Speak Up Day," the first ever national event in which students of all ages and grades, from all communities and schools will go online from their classrooms and share their opinions, ideas, and thoughts on how technology should be used in schools.

NetDay, a national education technology nonprofit, will compile the results and provide a report to schools for use in technology planning. The final report will be provided to the U.S. Department of Education to help shape the National Educational Technology Plan. All schools and students in the United States are encouraged to participate and can register online at <http://www.netday.org>.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress 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.