

ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

# Straight A's:

An Update on Public Education:  
Policy and Progress

Volume 3, No. 6: March 31, 2003

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## CONGRESS PASSES COMPETING BUDGET RESOLUTIONS AND HEADS TO CONFERENCE: Senate Increases Education \$8.2 Billion

Last week, the U.S. Senate passed its version of the congressional budget resolution that included an \$8.2 billion increase for education over the President's budget request. Two weeks ago, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a budget resolution that cut education 3 percent below the President's budget. The President has basically requested a freeze in education spending for fiscal year 2004.

The House budget resolution not only cuts education spending over last year, it also assumes a \$9.7 billion education cut over 10 years on the mandatory side of the budget. If adopted, substantial cuts to programs like school lunch and student loans would result.

The original Senate budget resolution, as reported by the Senate Budget Committee and drafted by **Senate Budget Committee Chairman Don Nickles (R-OK)**, provided only a \$900 million increase education funding. During floor debate, however, the Senate adopted six amendments that increase funding for education programs.

One such amendment, offered by **Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH)**, added \$2 billion in block grant funding for either *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* programs, special education, or vocational education. The increase is offset by unspecified cuts to other programs. Another Gregg amendment added \$3.3 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act over the next two years. Cuts in unspecified discretionary spending will also be used to offset the cost of that amendment.

Other successful amendments include an amendment by **Sens. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA)** that added an additional \$2 billion for *NCLB* programs and an amendment by **Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI)** that added \$275 million for education programs by closing tax loopholes in offshore accounts. A second Kennedy amendment added \$1.8 billion for the Pell Grant program (college grants for low-income students), an amount that would increase the annual maximum grant award to \$4,500. **Sen. James Inhofe's (R-OK)** amendment added \$112 million for the Impact Aid program. A number of "Sense of the Senate" amendments, including one supporting higher education and the after school program, also passed by voice vote, but did not add any additional funding.

## Competing Budget Resolutions Head to Conference

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In addition to the education amendments, one of the most noteworthy changes to the Senate budget resolution cut the President's \$726 billion tax package in half, to \$350 billion. The amendment, offered by **Sen. John Breau (D-LA)**, passed 51 to 48. The final Senate vote on the entire resolution was 56 to 44, on a vote that mostly followed party lines. Only six Democrats voted for the measure and only one Republican voted against.

The differing versions of the budget resolution will now go to a Senate-House conference committee, which will likely begin meeting during the week of March 31. While many observers will be focusing on the size of the tax cut, most people in the education community will be pushing Congress to accept the Senate version and its increase of approximately \$8.2 billion for education programs.

### Did You Know?

The budget resolution is a non-binding spending blueprint for Congress. It sets limits on the spending and tax legislation Congress will consider for the rest of the year, but is a non-binding document that is not signed by the President. Only the total amount of discretionary spending in the final budget resolution, not the specific program totals, is binding on the Appropriations Committees. In testimony before the House Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations Subcommittee, **U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige** told subcommittee members that he and President Bush are willing to rework the President's education budget request, but would not revise the total amount requested.



### BEATING THE ODDS: Urban Schools Make Progress Despite Budget Shortfalls

Despite budget shortfalls and difficulties surrounding the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, urban schools continue to make student achievement gains in the areas of math and reading, according to a recent survey. In its third annual report *Beating the Odds III*, the **Council of Great City Schools (CGCS)** found that 90 percent of its districts improved math scores and 83 percent improved reading scores in more than half the grades tested. Common to the most successful of the 59 school districts surveyed is an intensive program to teach reading and math to middle and high school students.

Almost all of the districts are making achievement gains despite the lack of adequate funding for their student populations. "In CGCS districts, students are almost twice as likely to come from low-income families or to have English as a second language as the average school district," notes the report, yet about 40 percent of these districts have per-pupil expenditures below statewide averages. To achieve these gains, CGCS found that successful school districts focused on student achievement and specific achievement goals, with a set schedule and defined consequences. They also concentrated on improving the lowest-performing schools by providing additional resources and training for teachers and administrators. The report also notes other components employed in these schools.

Michael Casserly, Executive Director of CGCS and author of the report, said, “Urban schools are making the kind of progress demanded by [NCLB]. The data suggest that improvement is possible on a relatively large scale—not just school-by-school—and that it can be accomplished under even the most challenging circumstances.”

The data have been collected every year for the past three years from the school districts, which are located in 36 states. The results are broken down by city, year, and grade on each state test in mathematics and reading.

While the report makes “every effort to report achievement data in a way that was consistent with *No Child Left Behind*,” some of the data goes back to before the law’s enactment. The report does not really address funding concerns, other than admitting that urban schools often lack adequate funding resources.

The complete report is available at: [http://www.cgcs.org/reports/beat\\_the\\_oddsIII.html](http://www.cgcs.org/reports/beat_the_oddsIII.html)



### **HOUSE REPUBLICANS INTRODUCE SPECIAL EDUCATION REAUTHORIZATION: Democrats Criticize Legislation for Failing to Meet the Federal Government’s Funding Commitment**

**Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE)**, Chairman of the House Education Reform subcommittee, recently introduced a bill to overhaul the law that governs special education and serves approximately 6.5 million children nationwide. Two companion bills, one promoting an expansion of loan forgiveness for teachers, and other advancing vouchers for special education students, were also introduced.

Castle’s bill, the *Improving Education Results for Children with Disabilities Act*, would reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to encourage early intervention, reduce paperwork requirements, and eliminate IQ tests to identify children as special education students.

#### **Bill Seeks Distinction Between Illiteracy and Learning Disability**

One of the major goals of Castle’s bill is to stop labeling illiterate children as “learning disabled” and then subsequently transferring them to special education classes. Some argue that “over-identification” not only hinders the academic development of students who are misidentified, it also takes away valuable resources from truly disadvantaged students. Castle’s bill hopes to end this practice through early intervention strategies that focus on reading ability. Very often, the only handicap possessed by a child who is labeled “learning disabled” is an inability to read. Castle’s proposal would to “give flexibility to school districts to use up to 15 percent of their funds for pre-referral services for students before they are identified as needing special education.”

Democrats were quick to point out that one of the chief problems with the current special education program is Congress’ failure to meet its promise to fully fund the program. When the law authorizing the program was passed in 1975, the federal government set a goal of paying 40 percent of the program’s cost. But even with increases over the past few years, the President’s proposed spending level for fiscal 2004 would cover only 19

## House Republicans Introduce Special Education Reauthorization

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percent of the cost. The Castle bill did nothing to remedy this problem because it included no mandatory funding to meet the government's commitment.

### Two Companion Bills Address Vouchers and Teacher Loan Forgiveness

While the Castle bill does not include any voucher proposals, a companion bill introduced by **Rep. Jim DeMint (R-SC)** would provide states an option to use federal funds to set up voucher programs for students in special education programs. DeMint's bill, which is patterned after Florida's McKay Scholarship Program, would allow parents who are dissatisfied with the services offered by their local school to transfer their child to a private school with the state picking up the cost. The Florida program, which is in its third year, has over 8,500 students participating and pays an average benefit of \$6,700 per student. However, this amount is often less than the cost of a private school. A recent report by People for the American Way found that the Florida program tends to benefit more affluent families because parents must cover the cost difference between the school's tuition and the amount provided by the scholarship. Some top private schools in Florida charge tuition of \$15,000 or more a year.

A third bill was introduced by **Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC)** and would expand the federal student loan forgiveness program for Americans who teach math, science, or special education in disadvantaged schools. The program mirrors a similar bill introduced in the Senate by **Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)** and included in the President's budget. It would increase the maximum loan forgiveness award from its current level of \$5,000 to \$17,500. However, unlike the President's budget proposal, this legislation would not make the teacher loan forgiveness program mandatory. Under the congressional plans, not every teacher who qualifies for the program would be guaranteed loan forgiveness. The President's proposal makes that guarantee.

The House Education and the Workforce Committee is expected to mark up the bill during the week of March 31<sup>st</sup>. The Senate hopes to be able to introduce a bipartisan bill in April.

### Alliance Recommendations for Attracting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers and Principals

In *New-Teacher Excellence*, the Alliance argues that \$17,500 in loan forgiveness should be offered in exchange for a commitment to teach in high-needs schools for at least four years. The Alliance is also recommending 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. Financial incentives, however, are not enough. To complement them, the schools would provide a two-year mentoring program for new teachers and a high-quality professional development program for all teachers. Well-designed induction programs, organized at the state level and implemented in local districts, can help schools hire, keep, and professionally develop qualified new teachers, whether trained in traditional or alternative teacher preparation programs.

Read the full report at: <http://www.all4ed.org/policymakers/NewTeacherExcellence/index.html>



## **SCHOOL BUILDING WEEK: Drawing Attention to the Importance of Well-Planned Schools**

Mark your calendars for April 7-11. *School Building Week 2003*, an event organized by **Council of Educational Planners International**, will draw national attention to the importance of well-planned, high-performing, healthy schools that foster student achievement and well-being.

This year's events are being held in Washington, D.C. and will include nine schools. The week will afford an opportunity to educate the public, policy makers and legislators on the importance of well-designed and well-maintained school facilities. Similar events are planned in Los Angeles and Cincinnati.

The program includes a six-to-eight-week mentorship between architectural college students and public school students, in which mentor teams work with students to introduce them to the elements of design and planning, and help the students construct their "ideal learning spaces." At the end of March, an architectural jury judged the collaborative design competition. The final projects will be displayed April 11, 2003 at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., where an awards ceremony will take place.

The program is only in its third year, but organizers hope to eventually expand the number of sites so that School Building Week can become a national program for students and communities. The Alliance has joined over 40 other organizations and agencies as a sponsor of School Building Week.

For more information on the event, visit the website at:  
<http://www.cefpi.org/schoolbuildingweek>



## **THE SEARCH CONTINUES: States Cross Borders and Oceans to Attract Quality Teachers**

California has begun efforts to recruit 195,000 teachers over the next 10 years. In Arizona, educators have traveled halfway around the world looking for experienced teachers. Around the country, school districts are finding it more and more difficult to find highly qualified math, science, and special education teachers and qualified teachers in all subjects in high-needs districts.

The California Teachers Association estimates that as many as 10,000 California teachers may be out of a job come fall because they will not meet the highly qualified requirement. The state is planning to spend more than \$9 million this year on recruiting teachers who will meet the requirement. Since the 2000-2001 school year, California has spent over \$330 million on college assistance, advertising, and other programs designed to attract high-quality teachers to its school districts.

At one time, states settled for finding "warm bodies" to fill their classroom needs. Now, post-*No Child Left Behind*, many states find that they must replace teachers who have

## States Cross Borders, Oceans to Attract Quality Teachers

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been teaching with “emergency credentials” with teachers who are fully trained and credentialed.

In Arizona, educators have traveled the globe (literally) to find experienced teachers for their math and science classes. According to *The Arizona Republic*, their search took them to New Delhi, India where they found teachers who were more than willing to leave behind classes of 50 students, a salary that is the equivalent of \$2,000 a month, and a tight job market where up to 1,000 teachers compete for a single job at a good school.

USA Employment, a two-year old company started by Houston businessman Jay Kumar, has placed 75 teachers from India in 15 school districts in Texas, Indiana, and Connecticut. The teachers, who have at least five years experience, pay their moving expenses and a \$6,000 finder’s fee to USA Employment, which helps them with immigration issues. The school districts then hire the teachers and help them obtain certification.

President of the Arizona Education Association Penny Kotterman told *The Arizona Republic* that USA Employment won’t solve rural school districts’ second-biggest problem—keeping the teachers. Kotterman said she would not be surprised if the Indian teachers follow the road of their predecessors and move to suburban schools for higher salaries unless “some of the other problems, such as salaries, and working conditions, are addressed.”

Read the complete *Arizona Republic* article at:

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/local/articles/0322india22.html>



### **GOT FUNDS?...FOR EDUCATION: Bipartisan Survey Finds Public Support for Increased Education Spending**

A national survey of 1,000 registered voters conducted jointly by Republican and Democratic pollsters confirms public support for increased federal spending on education. The poll was conducted on behalf of the **National Education Association (NEA)**.

Forty-four percent of those polled ranked education as one of their top two budget priorities, compared to health care (31 percent) and terrorism and security (30 percent). Fifty-seven percent of voters want the federal government to spend more than it currently does on education. A majority of the respondents (54 percent) believed that that education is a shared responsibility between federal, state and local governments.

The public seems to understand and sympathize with the financial burden placed on the states in their efforts to provide a quality education. Sixty-five percent of those polled supported a proposal for Congress to provide the states with \$50 billion in aid from the federal government. The poll also found that a strong, pro-education position supporting increased federal education funding helps candidates from both parties. The survey was conducted from Feb. 19 to Feb. 24, 2003, by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and The Tarrance Group.



## NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL HOLDS SPRING PARTNERS MEETINGS: Site Visits to Area High Schools Included on the Agenda

The **National Alliance on the American High School's (HS Alliance)** recently held its Spring Partners Meeting in Washington, D.C. The site visits allowed the HS Alliance's over 40 partners, including the Alliance for Excellent Education, to witness first-hand the wide-range of programs and practices underway in these schools.

On March 20, participants in the meetings divided into three groups and visited three area high schools in the Washington, D.C. area. One site visit was held at J.E.B. Stuart High School in Falls Church, Va. J.E.B. Stuart High School opened in Falls Church, Virginia, in 1959. At the time the school possessed a student body of 1,616—virtually all Caucasian. Today, due largely to an influx of immigrants to the United States, two-thirds of its 1,400 students are second language learners from over 70 countries. Despite facing the normal challenges associated with such a diverse enrollment, Stuart is a model of excellence. It has been cited by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, referred to as a model of diversity and harbinger of America's future in the 21st century by former-President Bill Clinton, and profiled in a 2001 edition of *National Geographic* magazine.

The school prides itself on being a “comprehensive high school with an international student body and a world class curriculum.” Partners of the HS Alliance were able to learn about the school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program, a rigorous college preparatory course of study that leads to examinations which challenge the most highly motivated high school students. The school also uses literacy coaches and teaches literacy across the curriculum within small classes.

Two other site visits were held at Marshall High School in Falls Church, Va. and the Maya Angelou Public Charter School in Washington, D.C. This is the third meeting of the HS Alliance's national partners; the last two were held in Chicago and Providence where participants toured exemplary high schools in the area.

The mission of the National Alliance on the American High School is 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.

Learn more about the HS Alliance at: <http://www.hsalliance.org>

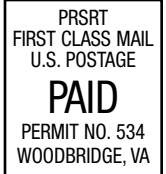
Read an excerpt of the National Geographic article on J.E.B. Stuart High School at: [http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/09/01/html/ft\\_20010901.3.html](http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/09/01/html/ft_20010901.3.html)

**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.



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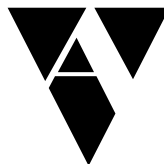


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