

Straight A's:

Public Education Policy and Progress

ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

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LEFT OUT AND LEFT BEHIND: New Alliance Report Examines NCLB and the American High School

On April 29, at an event co-sponsored by the **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)**, the Alliance for Excellent Education released a new report that examines the effect of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* on high schools. Although the law covers grades kindergarten through 12, most attention has been placed on *NCLB*'s impact on K-eight schools and, in particular, the testing requirements for grades three through eight. This focus, however, has given the mistaken impression that the law has little or no impact on high schools. While high schools do face fewer requirements than elementary and middle schools, they must still comply with several provisions of the new law.

The report, *Left Out and Left Behind: NCLB and the American High School*, noted that nearly 800 high schools have been identified by their states as "in need of improvement." If these schools are receiving *NCLB* Title I funds, they will confront the same sanctions elementary schools face in terms of school choice, supplemental services, and, eventually, restructuring. Because there is little or no federal support for students at this level, current funding does not begin to address the needs of the approximately 6 million at-risk middle and high school students who read below basic levels and are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school.

The complete report will be available on the Alliance Web site at: <http://www.all4ed.org> on the afternoon of April 29.



RECOGNIZING THE DROPOUT CRISIS: New Reporting Requirements in NCLB will Spotlight Pitifully Low Graduation Rates

In the past, national high school graduation rates sometimes did not receive the attention they deserved because of questions surrounding their reliability. With the enactment of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, the U.S. Congress and President Bush agreed to a much more accurate (and simpler) method to measure graduation rates.

As evidence of the confusion surrounding the old reporting method, a recent audit commissioned by the Houston Independent School District (HISD) found that Houston schools do not know how many teens quit school without graduating. While auditors did

Recognizing the Dropout Crisis

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not say that HISD intentionally manipulated the numbers, the audit found evidence of shortfalls in the district's record keeping. As a result, HISD school profiles show a dropout rate of only 1.5 percent, while, at the same time, reporting a graduation rate of only 72 percent.

NCLB defines graduation rate as the percentage of students, measured from the beginning of high school, who graduated with a regular diploma in the standard number of years. This methodology is consistent with that used by Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute in his report, *High School Graduation Rates in the United States*, adopted by the Alliance in *Left Out and Left Behind: NCLB and the American High School*.

This new measurement usually results in lower graduation rates—and higher dropout rates—than those that have been reported in the past to the U.S. Department of Education. For instance, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the national high school completion rate in 2000 was 86.5 percent—compared with 69 percent in the Greene study. This difference exists because the NCES numbers include students who have a GED or have obtained a diploma or its equivalent by the age of 24. The Greene study only measures students who receive a high school diploma on time.

Greene's numbers for individual states are shocking and range from a low of 55 percent for Florida to 87 percent in New Jersey; in seven cities, graduation rates are below 50 percent. The City of Cleveland's graduation rate is 28 percent.

According to the Alliance report, the failure of so many students to graduate from high school is cause for alarm and suggests that many American high schools, as they now exist, have become dysfunctional and would never be tolerated in the business world:

“No hospital, for example, would retain the confidence of the public if its patient survival rate equaled the 28 percent graduation rate of the Cleveland high schools. No profit-making delivery company like UPS or Federal Express would retain consumer confidence if its on-time delivery rate equaled Houston's graduation rate of only 52 percent.”

High School Students Are Being Left Behind

- Twenty-three percent of high school seniors (or 714,000) have difficulty reading on the eve of their high school graduation.
- Each day, approximately 3,000 students drop out of middle or high school.
- In many city schools, less than half of eighth graders will graduate from high school in five years.
- This year alone, nearly 540,000 students will leave the American school system.



STATES CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE WITH NCLB IMPLEMENTATION: Budget Deficits, New Mandates Create a Heavy Burden

Mark Boughton, mayor of Danbury, CT, told *The Associated Press* that *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* is a “great package, but it’s useless without money behind it. In the absence of these dollars, we have to prioritize, and *No Child Left Behind* is not a high priority when we need to make sure our classrooms have textbooks and teachers.”

Mayor Boughton is not alone in his opinion of *NCLB*. Faced with the worst budget crisis since World War II, at least 20 states across the country have had to cut K-12 education spending, which generally makes up the largest percentage of state budgets. These cuts are occurring during a time when more money is needed to meet new testing requirements and other federal mandates.

Several states, including New Jersey, North Dakota, Washington, and Tennessee have passed resolutions that urge Congress and President Bush to fully fund federal mandates, including *No Child Left Behind*. A few other states, including Hawaii and Utah, are considering ignoring the law and refusing federal funding in order to escape the law’s reach. New Hampshire is even considering a bill that would forbid the state from spending money to implement *NCLB*.

Earlier this year, governors from around the country came to Washington, D.C. for the **National Governors Association (NGA)** winter meetings and pleaded their case for more federal resources to meet federal mandates. In a unified voice, Republican and Democratic governors asked for help to meet demands for stepped-up homeland security, increasing costs of special education, and the funding that was promised for the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*. But their pleas fell on deaf ears at the White House.

In its defense, the U.S. Department of Education says the federal government is giving billions of dollars to states to pay for *NCLB*’s requirements. Education Undersecretary Eugene Hickok told *The Associated Press*, “A lot of this angst is caused by interest groups that don’t want to do this.”

Cuts to Education Programs Draw Protests Throughout the United States

Meanwhile, cuts in state education budgets have drawn protests across the country. From Fairbanks, AK to Frankfort, KY, citizens have gathered to protest larger class sizes, the elimination of preschool and after-school programs, and cuts in voter-approved school funds. Crowds in Frankfort and Oklahoma City drew over 20,000 people each. In total, at least 20 states have seen protests since January.

According to a forthcoming paper by William J. Mathis of the Vermont Society for the Study of Education, seven of 10 states recently studied would have to set aside 24 percent more money than is currently allocated for education to comply with all of *NCLB*’s requirements.

The study will appear in the May 2003 edition of *Phi Delta Kappan*, but a recent article on Stateline.com gave a snapshot of some of the findings:

- Maryland estimates that it will cost more than \$7.2 billion to help its students meet the new federal requirements, a 46 percent increase.
- South Carolina projects that it will have to raise education spending by 24 percent.
- Texas will have to spend an additional \$6.9 billion for education, a 101 percent increase.

The complete stateline.org article is available at:
<http://www.stateline.org/story.do?storyId=298327>

New Report Finds an Additional \$1.7 Billion Needed for “Ideal School”

Imagine schools that pay teachers competitive salaries, have low student-to-teacher ratios, and allow more professional development days for their teachers. In Washington state, they exist, but only on paper. According to an April 4 article in *The Seattle Times*, a new report says that Washington would have to increase annual state education spending by \$1.7 billion—a 23 percent increase—in order to turn every school into an “ideal” public school. The report “What Will It Take?,” by the Rainier Institute, identifies what an ideal public school should look like and how much it would take to create it.

Because Washington state is facing a \$2.6 billion deficit, the report is seen as a tool for decision-makers as they develop education budgets, rather than an immediate call to action for state lawmakers. Supporters of the study, which include the Washington Education Association, hope that the results will be used to show how schools are affected if less money is spent on education. A similar study was conducted in Oregon that was used as a funding guide for legislators.

According to the report, an ideal school would have the following:

- Full-day kindergarten with a 18-to-1 student-teacher ratio
- One computer for each teacher and one computer for every six students
- Ten professional development days for teachers
- Pupil-teacher ratios in first through fourth grade at 21- to-1, rather than the current 24-to-1



THEY WORK HARD FOR THEIR EDUCATION: Successful Chicago High School Pairs Students with Businesses to Help Pay Tuition

Chicago’s Cristo Rey Jesuit High School first opened its doors in 1996 on the southwest side of the city in a poor, mostly Latino neighborhood. It was founded to meet the educational needs of the students in the Pilsen/Little Village neighborhoods where the dropout rate in the public schools averages 65 percent. Now, seven years later, Cristo Rey has a dropout rate of 1 percent, a graduation rate of 93 percent, and 80 percent of its graduates pursue higher education. What’s the secret? Cristo Rey literally makes the students work for their education.

One year’s tuition at Cristo Rey is \$8,450. Of that total, 26 percent (\$2,200) is paid by the student. Another portion of the tuition is paid through various scholarship programs both from within the school and from outside sources. More than 40 percent of Cristo Rey’s students receive financial aid. The remainder of the tuition is paid for through the school’s *Corporate Internship Program (CIP)*.

Students who participate in the CIP work five days a month in entry-level, clerical jobs in one of the 93 participating companies in downtown Chicago. These businesses include banks, law firms, advertising agencies, and financial offices. In exchange for the students' work, the companies help pay tuition costs.

After visiting the Cristo Rey school and discovering how well the partnership worked for the school and students alike, Mr. and Mrs. B.J. Cassin decided to donate \$22 million to establish the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation to spread the model throughout the country. The Foundation works with religious orders, dioceses, and other groups seeking to establish faith-based college preparatory middle and high schools in economically challenged communities throughout the country. The Foundation has begun funding efforts to create more "Cristo Rey" schools in Austin, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Los Angeles, New York, and Tucson.

Learn more about Cristo Rey High School at: <http://www.cristorey.net>



STUDY FINDS CHARTER SCHOOLS LOW ON RESOURCES: Unqualified Teachers and Little Federal Funding Plague Charter Schools

A new study finds that the funding crunch that many schools throughout the country are feeling is also affecting our nation's charter schools. The study found that many charter schools face a dearth of federal funding and have a high percentage of teachers who lack certification. The Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) at Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley, analyzed federally produced data on 870 charter schools in the 1999-2000 school year. (The report is available at: http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/04/08_charter.shtml).

According to the report, 48 percent of charter school teachers lack a teacher certificate, compared to 9 percent in regular public schools; charter school teachers instruct 20 percent more students each day than their regular school counterparts; and California charter school teachers make an average \$38,000 a year, compared to the state public school average of \$52,000.

Charter school quality may disproportionately affect minority students. In charter schools the minority enrollments reach 80 percent, while comparable schools are more integrated with a high of 54 percent minority. In charters that have predominately minority students, 60 percent of teachers lack credentials and two-thirds of students come from poor families. Although 43 percent of these students qualify for subsidized lunches, only about 5 percent of them actually receive subsidized lunches due to low federal assistance to charter schools.

The study has drawn disapproval from charter school advocates such as the Center for Education Reform (CER) and the California Network of Educational Charters. Some believe that the study's data is flawed, breaks little ground, and does not accurately reflect the current state of charter schools. According to the *New York Times*, CER argues that traditional state credentials have no connection to quality teaching and that the study ignored achievement gains documented in charter schools.



HIGH TIME FOR HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: Gates' Small Schools Program Finds Tough Early Going, but Promising Outlook

The second annual evaluation of the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's** grants to create smaller high schools concludes that the schools have fostered improved student-teacher relationships that lead many students to feel more devoted to their schoolwork. As the report noted, "Student-teacher relationships in the small schools were deeper and more supportive, both academically and personally, than is typical in larger, comprehensive schools."

The evaluation conducted by **The American Institutes for Research** and **SRI International** found that it is still too early in the life of these small schools to evaluate the impact on student achievement. One significant finding is that the implementation process to transform larger high schools into new, smaller, high schools is much more difficult than first imagined.

The study found the newly established small schools were struggling to implement consistent, innovative instructional practices. In addition, the process is time consuming and often exceedingly stressful on the teachers who are trying to teach full-time while dealing with the complex issues of establishing a new school. The study reports, "Schools whose grantees offered specific models, procedures, logistical help, and curriculum consulting said that these detailed resources were invaluable supports for an otherwise unwieldy implementation process."

Converting large high schools into small ones has been more difficult. Of the seven conversion schools studied, one had converted all four grades, one had converted only ninth grade, and the remaining five were still planning their conversions. The study found the process typically takes two years to implement. The first year was usually spent formalizing a vision for the school, while the second year was generally when specific design activities began. One specific difficulty occurs because the movement for change usually comes from the district level—which leaves teachers feeling disenfranchised from the process. As a result, some teachers are skeptical of the reforms while others are encouraged by them and eager to provide more personal attention to their students.

One recommendation for smoothing out these implementation problems is to offer the teachers and administrators paid planning time and detailed implementation supports. The Gates Foundation remains committed to high school reform, recognizing that it will take several years to adequately correlate student achievement to their reforms. "It is important for reformers and funders to set expectations appropriately, and to anticipate a need for extended financial, policy, and intellectual support as school leaders and teachers embark on the important and challenging journey of school improvement," according to the report.

See "High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings From the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program" at:
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/SmallHighSchools>



BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE...IN THE CLASSROOM: Retired Military Personnel Turn to Teaching

At a time when education and homeland security are such important domestic priorities, the innovative program Troops-to-Teachers (TTT) meets two important needs. Reflecting the focus of the nation and *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* on the need for qualified teachers, TTT helps relieve shortages, especially in math, science, special education and other high-needs subject areas. But it also assists military personnel in making successful transitions to second careers in teaching and preserves the talent and potential of our armed services that might otherwise be lost to retirement.

Established in 1994, the program provides participants with stipends up to \$5,000 to help pay teacher certification costs in return for an agreement to teach for three years in a school located in a high-need district. Individuals on active duty may register for the program at any time, but they will not be eligible to apply for funding until one year prior to retirement.

Military personnel interested in elementary or secondary teaching positions must have a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited college and those interested in teaching vocational subjects are required to have the equivalent of one year of college and six years of related experience. TTT provides participants with a mentor connection, a network of TTT participants currently working as teachers, an employment search and counseling, referral, and placement assistance through state placement assistance offices.

Since 1994, more than 4,000 TTT participants have been hired in our public schools, where they have a high retention rate and, for the most part, have been highly successful teachers. They have increased the number of male and minority teachers of math, science, and special education. Participants also report high levels of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of teaching, including a 95 percent satisfaction in their relationships with students.

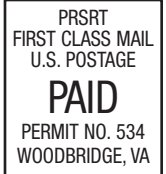
More information on Troops-To-Teachers is available at:
<http://www.proudtoserveagain.com>

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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