



# Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **HOUSE COMMITTEE APPROVES \$100 MILLION FOR STRIVING READERS: Smaller Learning Communities Cut by \$72 Million**

Earlier this month, the House Appropriations Committee included \$100 million for an adolescent literacy program, Striving Readers, in the fiscal 2005 spending bill that funds the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. In total, the bill reported out of committee includes a \$2 billion increase for education over last year. Of this amount, federal K–12 programs would see an increase of about \$325 million over last year if Congress makes no further changes.

“This is a fair, balanced, nonpartisan bill in response to the amount of money we have,” said **House Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula (R-OH)**. “We would all like to have more money.”

When he presented his budget request to Congress at the beginning of the year, President Bush said the \$100 million for Striving Readers would focus on developing and implementing research-based interventions to improve the skills of teenage students who read below grade level. As the U.S. Education Department’s budget summary noted, “secondary school educators currently have little information to guide their decisions about which practices and programs are effective in helping to raise the reading achievement of teenage students.” The Striving Readers initiative would test a variety of interventions through experimental studies to assess their effectiveness, and disseminate the results widely to schools and districts.

A new Secondary Education Mathematics initiative received \$120 million in funding in the committee bill. The program would provide 100 to 140 competitive grants to help ensure that secondary school math teachers are highly qualified. However, the committee chose not to fund the president’s request for Enhanced Pell Grants for State Scholars. The \$33 million program would have provided an additional Pell award of up to \$1,000 to low-income students who participate in the State Scholars program, which encourages low-income students to complete a rigorous four-year course of study.

## **Title I and Special Education Each to Receive \$1 Billion Increase, Smaller Learning Communities Cut by \$72 Million**

The committee bill would provide Title I and special education each with a \$1 billion increase, however twenty-seven smaller programs were eliminated. The House Committee cut funding for the Smaller Learning Communities program while the president proposed to eliminate it. The program will be decreased by \$72 million from last year’s level, from \$174 million to \$102

## House Committee Approves \$100 Million for Striving Readers

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million, if the committee bill is eventually acted into law. According to research listed on the Department of Education’s own website, “smaller learning environments are a condition for boosting student achievement” and “school size has positive effects on student outcomes as evidenced by students’ attendance rates, frequency of disciplinary actions, school loyalty, use of alcohol or drugs, satisfaction with school and self-esteem.”

### Education Spending May be Frozen Until After November Elections

The Senate has not begun action of its version of this year’s spending bill for education. While GOP leaders hope to roll most individual appropriations bills into a much larger comprehensive—or “omnibus spending”—bill before the November elections, the Labor, HHS, Education appropriation is not expected to be part of the package. In all likelihood, programs in this bill will be funded at last year’s levels through a continuing resolution.

A continuing resolution (CR) is a temporary funding measure that allows Congress to extend the time to pass spending bills and send them to the president for his signature. It is possible that Congress will revisit Labor, HHS, Education spending in a lame-duck session after the election.

### Committee Spending Levels for Selected Programs

Program	FY 2004 Funding Level	FY 2005 Bush Budget	House Committee
Title I	\$12.34 billion	\$13.34 billion	\$13.34 billion
Special Education (IDEA)	\$11.16 billion	\$12.18 billion	\$12.18 billion
Title II: Teacher Quality	\$2.93 billion	\$2.93 billion	\$2.95 billion
TRIO	\$832.6 million	\$832.6 million	\$842.6 million
GEAR UP	\$298.2 million	\$298.2 million	\$318.2 million
21st Century Learning Centers	\$999 million	\$999 million	\$999 million
Elementary and Secondary School Counseling	\$33.8 million	Eliminates program	\$33.8 million
Carl D. Perkins Vocational & Technical Program	\$1.33 billion	\$1 billion	\$1.33 billion
Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants	\$88.89 million	\$88.89 million	\$88.9 million
Smaller Learning Communities	\$174 million	Eliminates program	\$101.7 million



## **STATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT: New Report Finds Teacher Prep Is One of the Greatest Challenges**

Preparing teachers to be effective and successful in the classroom is one of the greatest challenges states must overcome in order to meet the requirements of the controversial No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), according to a new report released by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). The findings show that few states are on track to provide high-quality professional development for all teachers.

*ECS Report to the Nation: State Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act* was released at a session of the 2004 National Forum on Education Policy, held in Orlando, Florida, July 13–16. The report is based primarily on statistics culled from a database developed by ECS staff with a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The report compares state progress from March 2003 through March 2004.

“There has been and continues to be a great deal of discussion around NCLB on many levels,” said **Ted Sanders, president of ECS**, a Denver-based nonprofit that helps state and federal policymakers improve student learning. “But this is the first chance the nation has had to view the issues in terms of what states are actually doing.”

The report found that just five states—Connecticut, Kentucky, New York, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania—had met, or were partially on track to meet, all forty NCLB requirements. Some of these requirements include the adoption of reading, math, and science standards; standards for teacher employment; and school report cards, among others.

“Not since *A Nation at Risk* has a report on education been so needed,” said Milton Goldberg, ECS distinguished senior fellow. “The *ECS Report to the Nation* demonstrates that major shifts in state education policy can occur over a relatively short time. While adaptations in No Child Left Behind continue to be made, the overall progress is remarkable.”

Only ten states appear fully on track to ensuring that both new and veteran teachers are qualified to teach in their subject areas. And fewer than half the states are on track to making sure that scientifically based technical assistance is provided to low-performing schools.

ECS identified five recommendations for federal officials and state policymakers: embracing NCLB as a civil rights issue; ensuring performance growth of all students, not just low-performing students; reassessing Adequate Yearly Progress; strengthening states’ highly qualified teacher requirements; and building state and local capacity.

“It is time to realize the promise of educational quality set forth 50 years ago in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, which increased access for millions of American children,” concluded Sanders. “NCLB holds the potential to help fulfill that promise, and we must build upon the findings of this report to make the law work.”

To learn more about this report and to access the NCLB database online, visit the ECS website at <http://www.ecs.org/html/special/nclb/reporttothenation/reporttothenation.htm>.



## **AMERICANS SPEAK ON PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING: Majority of Americans Say Schools in Poor Neighborhoods Are Either Inadequate or in Crisis**

A majority of Americans recognize that there are significant differences in the quality of schools in high- and low-income areas, and they worry about an overreliance on property taxes as a way to fund schools, according to a national survey released by the Educational Testing Service. A full 60 percent of poll respondents believe schools in poor neighborhoods are either inadequate or in crisis. These findings were taken from *Equity and Adequacy: Americans Speak on Public School Funding*, the fourth annual public opinion poll conducted by **Democratic pollster Peter Hart** and the late **Republican pollster Robert Teeter**.

At a June 30 press conference, **Allan Rivlin, senior vice president for Hart-Teeter Research**, said that people from all economic backgrounds have a concern for schools in low-income areas at least as great as their concerns about schools in their own backyards. “People feel strongly that there’s a real problem in terms of quality in low-income areas,” he said. In fact, 65 percent of respondents said they believed it is appropriate to allocate tax revenues raised in other areas to schools in low-income areas.

The poll found that nearly half of all Americans (45 percent) feel that schools need dramatic improvements, with 30 percent calling for major changes and 15 percent favoring a complete overhaul. However, it also found mistrust among much of the public of education spending, with 76 percent of all respondents, and 74 percent of those identifying themselves as parents, believing that at least a “fair amount” of taxpayer money was being wasted on K–12 education. Perhaps due to this mistrust, a majority of respondents were unwilling to accept higher taxes, particularly at the local level, to fund education.

More information on the survey is available at <http://www.ets.org/news/04070101.html>.

### **New York “Push-Out” Cases Reach Settlement**

Last year, the New York–based **Advocates for Children** released a report that said many of the city’s public schools tried to improve their graduation rates by pushing out students who struggle academically. As a result, a series of court cases were filed on behalf of New York City public school students who claimed they were denied their right to attend school.

Last month, a settlement was reached in the last of the cases. As a result of the settlement, procedures were put in place that require holding exit conferences for students who will be leaving school or entering GED programs. This conference is designed to ensure that students will not be forced to leave school. It also requires a school to inform students and their parents about a student’s right to remain in school until the age of twenty-one before being discharged or transferred.

More information on the New York push-out cases is available at <http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/>.



## **THE TALENT DEVELOPMENT HIGH SCHOOL MODEL: New Report Finds Substantial Gains in Course-Completion and Promotion Rates Among Ninth Graders**

A new report on the Talent Development High School model found that first-time ninth graders made substantial gains in academic course credits earned and promotion rates, and modest improvements in attendance. The report, *The Talent Development High School Model: Context, Components, and Initial Impacts on Ninth-Grade Students' Engagement and Performance*, examines five large, nonselective high schools from a northeastern, urban school district that have implemented the Talent Development model.

According to the report, high schools in the study were “characterized by low student engagement, poor prior preparation among entering ninth graders, low ninth-grade promotion rates, and continued problems in the upper grades.” More than 75 percent of the students entered ninth grade with reading and math skills below grade level, and fewer than 40 percent were on schedule to graduate four years after starting high school.

During the first year of the implementation of the Talent Development model, each of the five schools in the study created a Ninth Grade Success Academy. Within each academy, there are self-contained teams composed of at least four teachers from several disciplines, and 150 to 200 students. Schools also created extended-length class periods in order to provide a double mathematics courseload and a double reading/English courseload.

Results from the new Talent Development schools were measured against results from other district schools. In every case, students in the Talent Development schools outperformed their peers who were not in the program.

On average, about 43 percent of first-time ninth graders completed a core academic curriculum (at least five credits, with three credits in math, English, and science) prior to the implementation of the Talent Development model. After the program's implementation, 56 percent of students—an increase of 13 percent—completed a core academic curriculum. By contrast, the percentage of first-time ninth graders who completed a core academic curriculum in non-Talent Development comparison schools increased only 4 percent during the same period.

The report concludes that the Talent Development model “helps keep ninth-grade students on-track for graduation.” Subsequent reports will track student outcomes for up to five follow-up years and will determine whether improvements in ninth-grade promotion rates translate into increased graduation rates.

The complete report is available at <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/388/overview.html>.



## ALLIANCE CO-HOSTS SUMMER BREAKFAST SERIES: Leaders in Education Discuss Successful High School Transformation and Increasing Graduation Rates

This summer, the Alliance for Excellent Education and America Graduates co-hosted a summer breakfast series during which leaders in the field of education gathered to discuss issues related to successful high school transformation and ways to increase graduation rates. Experts presented recent research findings and spotlighted effective transformations through profiles of emerging models.

On June 21, the first session in the series featured the premier researchers in the United States currently examining high school graduation rates. **Nettie Legters and Robert Balfanz from Johns Hopkins University** discussed the findings of their latest report, *Locating the Dropout Crisis: Which High Schools Produce the Majority of the Nation's Dropouts, Where are they Located, and Who Attends Them?* **Daniel Losen from Harvard University's Civil Rights Project** presented the findings of *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*, which was jointly released by the Civil Rights Project, Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, and the Civil Society Institute earlier in 2004.

On July 8, **Mike Cohen, President of Achieve**, and **Susan Traiman of the Business Roundtable** presented at the second breakfast meeting in the series. Cohen discussed the findings of Achieve's latest report, *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up?: A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams*, and Traiman responded to the issues from the business perspective.

In the third and final session in the summer series, the focus turned to adolescent literacy. **Donna Alvermann of the University of Georgia**, discussed her new book, *Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap: Grades 4-12*, co-written by Dorothy Strickland of Rutgers University (see article below). The book integrates research and practice about successful literacy development for older students and is an invaluable resource in discussions of both adolescent literacy and the achievement gap. **Betty Sturtevant, Literacy Program Co-coordinator at George Mason University**, spoke about her work in the area of adolescent literacy and coaching. Sturtevant authored a November 2003 report released by the Alliance for Excellent Education, *The Literacy Coach: A Key to Improving Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools*.

*Locating the Dropout Crisis* is available at  
[http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/rsch/Locating\\_Dropouts.pdf](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/rsch/Locating_Dropouts.pdf).

*Losing Our Future* is available at  
[http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410936\\_LosingOurFuture.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410936_LosingOurFuture.pdf).

*Do Graduation Tests Measure Up?* is available at  
[http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/TestGraduation-FinalReport/\\$file/TestGraduation-FinalReport.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/TestGraduation-FinalReport/$file/TestGraduation-FinalReport.pdf).

*The Literacy Coach* is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/LiteracyCoach.pdf>.



**BRIDGING THE LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT GAP: New Book Points to Improving Literacy Skills Among Adolescents as a Way to Close the Gap**

Despite efforts by educators and policymakers during the past few decades, certain groups of students—disproportionately African Americans, English-language learners, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds—continue to underperform on widespread assessments compared to peers. For example, on the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading, white twelfth graders scored 292 on average, while their African-American and Latino peers scored at averages of 267 and 273, respectively. Researchers refer to this gap in students’ academic performance as the “achievement gap.” A new book, *Bridging the Literacy Achievement Gap, Grades 4–12*, edited by **Dorothy Strickland** and **Donna Alvermann**, addresses critical issues related to pre-adolescent and adolescent literacy learners with a focus on closing this persistent achievement gap.

The book highlights promising practices for closing the gap by improving the literacy skills of adolescent students, and offers valuable examples of how changing instruction can raise student achievement. According to **Ronald Ferguson, professor at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University**, “the work that the authors in this volume do in their professional practices and report in the chapters of this book provides evidence that many promising ideas are being developed and applied in the emerging national movement to close achievement gaps.”

Alvermann and Strickland are two members of the Alliance for Excellent Education’s Intermediate and Adolescent Literacy Advisory Group. The collective expertise of this group continues to guide and refine the Alliance’s work to affect adolescent literacy.

For more information on the members of this advisory group, please visit [http://www.all4ed.org/adolescent\\_literacy/Advisory\\_Group.html](http://www.all4ed.org/adolescent_literacy/Advisory_Group.html).

For more information on the book, including ordering information, visit <http://store.tcpress.com/0807744867.shtml>.



During the month of August, the Alliance for Excellent Education will temporarily suspend its publication of *Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress*. The next issue will be dated September 12.

We at the Alliance wish you a happy and safe August recess.

**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 nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s secondary school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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Public Education Policy And Progress

Volume 4 No. 14: July 26, 2004

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## Volume 4 No. 14: July 26, 2004

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