



# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **IMPROVING THE LIVES OF OUR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: Alliance and Scholastic Co-Host Invitational High School Literacy Summit in Phoenix**

In *Every Child a Graduate*, the Alliance noted that approximately a quarter of all high school students read at “below basic” levels. Hundreds of thousands of students who make it through four years of high school cannot read and write well enough to succeed in college or compete in today’s increasingly competitive job market. More tragically, over 30 percent of all students do not even graduate from high school, and in urban schools these rates rise above 50 percent.

Last week, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Phoenix (AZ) Union High School District, and Scholastic, Inc., an education publishing firm, co-hosted a high school literacy summit that convened about 125 leaders from the education and policy communities to discuss how to improve outcomes for the millions of middle and high school students who struggle to read at grade level.

Speakers included top literacy researchers, as well as practitioners who are implementing reading intervention programs around the country. Participants viewed one example of an intensive reading intervention program, **Scholastic’s READ 180**, visiting the ten Phoenix Union High School District’s schools in which the program is being used to help students whose reading achievement is below grade level. Approximately 3,600 of the district’s students are participating in the READ 180 program.

“Leaders from the Phoenix Union High School District and leaders from the business community have forged a partnership that is transforming local high schools into centers of learning and engagement, where struggling readers are given an opportunity for success,” said **Susan Frost, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education**. “Phoenix is a good example of the districts that have made the required commitment of leadership, staff, resources, and instructional materials necessary to teach struggling readers. All students in ninth and tenth grades who are reading below grade level are receiving intensive reading intervention, and their teachers have access to professional development in teaching reading across the curriculum.”

“There’s a growing awareness that the dropout rate is not under control, especially in minority populations, and that a lot of that has to do with high-schoolers’ poor reading skills,” said **Ernest Fleishman, Scholastic’s senior vice president for education**. “So we need to turn that around.”

To view the Alliance’s PowerPoint presentation from the high school literacy summit, visit <http://www.all4ed.org/Alliance-ScholasticConference2004.ppt>.

## A Closer Look at READ 180

*READ 180*, created as a result of more than ten years of research by experts at Vanderbilt University, is an intensive reading program designed to meet the needs of students whose reading achievement is below the proficient level. Through a collaborative research effort between Vanderbilt University and the Orange County Public School System in Florida, the *READ 180* pilot was used with more than 10,000 students between 1991 and 1999. The research showed that when schools implement and follow the instructional model, significant gains can be expected after one to two years in the areas of reading achievement, the development of more positive attitudes and behaviors, and overall higher school achievement.

*READ 180* is designed to support teachers in their efforts to improve reading achievement for students reading below grade level in grades four through twelve. The *READ 180* approach begins with 20 minutes of whole-class literacy, in which the teacher and students engage in shared reading, read aloud, or mini skill lessons. Next, the students are split into three groups, and each group participates in three 20-minute rotations. During each of the three rotations the teacher works directly with one small group of students, while the remaining two groups work independently at the computer or reading stations. After the three rotations, the instruction ends with a 10-minute wrap-up for students to reflect on their daily performance.

The *READ 180* instructional model provides a simple way to organize instruction and classroom activity. It combines research-based reading practices with the effective use of technology, offering students an opportunity to achieve reading success through a combination of instructional, modeled, and independent reading components. The instructional model is designed to send a strong message that each individual is valued, supported, given choices, and can succeed. The *READ 180* model combines the following elements:

- Recommended 90-minute daily class periods
- Reduced class size of 15-21 students per class
- *READ 180* software that provides students with daily, intensive, individualized practice
- Daily modeled or independent reading practice
- Daily individual or small-group instruction
- Whole-group instruction in word analysis, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and writing
- Distinct classroom areas designed for each type of instructional activity including, computer area with five computers for the *READ 180* instructional software, a comfortable reading area with cassette players and headphones for listening to the *READ 180* audio books, and a worktable for teacher-directed small-group instruction

More information about the program is available at: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/read180/>



## LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR DC GRADUATES: Congressional Committee Reviews DC Tuition Assistance Grant Program

Since its creation in fall 2000, the Washington, DC Tuition Assistance Grant Program (DC TAG) has awarded over \$63 million to more than 6,500 Washington DC students—many of whom are first generation college attendees. The brainchild of **Representative Thomas M. Davis III (R-VA)** and **Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)**, DC TAG covers the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates for DC high school graduates at public colleges and universities throughout the United States.

According to Representative Davis, who chairs the House Committee on Government Reform, DC TAG was created to “level the playing field” for DC residents. The District of Columbia has few public colleges; thus, low and middle income DC high school graduates had few options. DC TAG provides access to a network of state-supported institutions, giving DC graduates the opportunity to select from a much broader array of options.

“Quite simply, were it not for this program, thousands of DC families could not have afforded to send their sons and daughters to college,” said **Washington, DC Mayor Anthony Williams (D)**, in testimony at a hearing last month before the Government Reform Committee. Mayor Williams credited the DC TAG program for sending more DC residents to college than ever before. Over a four year period, the number of DC high school graduates who enrolled as freshmen in colleges and universities nationwide increased by 28 percent, from 1,750 in 1998 to 2,230 in 2002, and it is expected that these numbers will continue to grow. Over the same period, the national average increase was only 5 percent. “Students have attended more than 300 institutions in 46 states,” Williams said, “including nationally recognized public institutions like the University of Virginia, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and the University of California-Berkeley.”

DC TAG covers the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates for up to \$10,000 a year or \$50,000 over a lifetime. The program also provides \$2,500 a year in tuition assistance to DC graduates who attend private colleges and universities in the counties surrounding the District. Finally, DC graduates who attend private Historically Black Colleges and Universities farther afield are also eligible for \$2,500 annually in tuition assistance.

The initial legislation authorized five years of funding, during which the program has received \$17 million annually. With the authorization set to expire after next year, Davis and Norton introduced H.R. 4012 to reauthorize the DC College Access Act. Because the program enjoys tremendous bipartisan support, Davis is hopeful that the program will see renewal this year.

Because of the popularity of the program, Mayor Williams has requested an additional \$8.6 million in additional funding in the reauthorization, to allow DC TAG to continue awarding the same level of benefits as in the past to new graduates. However, Davis doubts that much additional funding is likely. “I hope we can get a little more,” he said. “It’s a tight budget year.”

More information on the DC TAG program is available at [http://seo.dc.gov/services/post\\_secondary\\_financial\\_assistance/tuition\\_assistance/index.shtm](http://seo.dc.gov/services/post_secondary_financial_assistance/tuition_assistance/index.shtm).



## **SHOW ME THE MONEY: Denver Teachers Approve a Pay for Performance Plan**

Typically, teachers around the country are paid according to their years of service and the numbers of graduate education courses they have taken. However, under a new salary system approved last month, that system may soon change in Denver, CO.

In the future, Denver teachers could earn pay raises for improving student achievement, working in hard-to-staff schools, receiving good evaluations, and/or continuing their professional development. The new plan, Professional Compensation System for Teachers, or ProComp, was supported by 59 percent of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA). Turnout at the meeting to consider the new system was high, with over 85 percent of DCTA members voting.

“We’re delighted teachers have supported the ideas that are at the heart of ProComp,” said **Denver Public Schools Board of Education President Les Woodward**. “The new system

## Denver Teachers Approve a Pay for Performance Plan

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acknowledges and rewards outstanding teachers and will enhance their professional capabilities. But the bottom line is the compensation system's impact on student achievement and our pilot has shown that students benefit when teachers work toward rigorous student achievement objectives.”

While participation would be optional for current teachers, those hired after January 2006 would be automatically enrolled in the program. Pay raises would be based on a percentage of the starting salary for new teachers—currently \$32,971. In collaboration with their principals, teachers would determine annual goals for their students' academic growth. Teachers who meet their goals would receive a 1 percent raise, while teachers who exceed their goals would receive a 3 percent raise.

Teachers who work in schools with the greatest academic need, as well as teachers and specialists who fill positions in hard-to-staff schools would earn raises of 3 percent in addition to the other raises for which they qualify. Research has shown that high-poverty schools are particularly challenged in their attempts to recruit and retain qualified teachers. Teachers who complete an advanced degree in a subject they teach would receive an additional 2 percent raise and teachers who earn certification from the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards would receive additional raises of 9 percent.

In 2005, the plan will go before Denver voters who must approve a \$25 million property tax increase to pay for it. If approved, Denver residents with homes worth \$251,000—the average in Denver—would pay an additional \$50 in taxes annually.

“Denver Teachers Approve Pay-for-Performance Plan”:

[http://www.edweek.com/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=28denver\\_web.h23](http://www.edweek.com/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=28denver_web.h23)



### **ON TO CONFERENCE: House Passes Budget Plan, Does Not Allow Vote on \$5.7 Billion Education Amendment**

On March 25, the U.S. House of Representatives passed its budget plan for fiscal 2005, but did not allow a floor vote on a comprehensive budget amendment drafted by **House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member David Obey (D-WI)** that would have increased education spending by \$5.7 billion. Specifically, the amendment would have added \$1.5 billion for Title I, \$1.2 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, \$500 million for school improvement, and \$2.2 billion to raise the Pell grant maximum award by \$450.

The education amendment was part of a larger \$19.2 billion amendment that would have invested \$13.2 billion in “key areas of national concern neglected in the budget resolution,” according to Obey. “Public education, worker training, veterans' health, environmental protection and housing are singled out for severe cuts even though they constitute just one-sixth of the federal budget,” said the Congressman. “Despite rhetoric to the contrary, these services have had almost nothing to do with the recent rise in the deficit, which was, in fact, largely caused by the Republicans' explosive tax cuts for the rich.”

The House budget plan—which passed on a narrow 215-212 vote—would reduce taxes by \$138 billion over five years, raise military spending by 7 percent, devote \$329 billion to domestic programs (slightly less than called for in the president’s budget), and make an unspecified \$13 billion cut to entitlement programs such as welfare and Medicare over the next five years.

House and Senate conferees met several times last week, but were unable to reach a compromise. The main issue of contention between the House and Senate budget plans is whether to offset any new tax cuts with corresponding spending cuts or tax increases elsewhere. The House version requires that any increases to mandatory spending, but not new tax cuts, be paid for by one of these options. The Senate-passed version requires that both mandatory spending increases and tax cuts be paid for through such offsets.

Further action on a compromise is not expected to occur until the week of April 19, once both chambers return from their spring recess.



### **STATE COMMISSION RECOMMENDS BILLIONS FOR NEW YORK SCHOOLS: Governor’s Commission Calls for \$2.5 Billion to \$5.6 Billion Increase in Funding**

New York schools will need an extra \$2.5 billion to \$5.6 billion a year to provide a sound basic education to every child in the state, according to **Governor George E. Pataki’s (R)** Commission on Education Reform. Pataki asked the commission to consider the needs of every child in the state, not just in New York City.

Released last week, the Commission’s report, *Ensuring Children an Opportunity for a Sound Basic Education*, was required by a New York Court of Appeals ruling that threw out the state’s school-funding formula last year. The court ruled that the state had failed to ensure that students in New York City schools had the chance for a sound, basic education as guaranteed by the state constitution. New York Governor Pataki and the state legislature were ordered to fix the system by July 30, 2004.

In what the *New York Times* called an “audacious play” for billions of dollars in state money, **New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg** said that New York City by itself should receive \$5.3 billion of the \$5.6 billion recommended by the governor’s commission. In the mayor’s plan, released just two days after the commission’s report, Bloomberg said he would spend the money on smaller class sizes for kindergarten through third grade, restructured middle schools, new incentive programs for teachers, and universal pre-kindergarten for the city’s three- and four-year olds. In response, the governor’s office said Governor Pataki would review Bloomberg’s plan but also noted that the state “faces a nearly \$5 billion deficit and very real fiscal challenges.”

The state currently provides approximately \$14.5 billion a year to its schools. The commission’s recommendations represent a 17- to 39 percent increase to be phased in over five years. The commission did not, however, suggest how much of that increase should come from the state versus local governments. Nor did it specify the source of new funding, leaving that decision up to the state legislature. These two omissions have caused some people to criticize the report: **New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D)** told the *New York Times* that the commission “appears to have done nothing more than compile and rehash previous and current

## State Commission Recommends Billions for New York Schools

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proposals by the governor;” **State Senator Nicholas A. Spano (R)** said that the commission left the toughest decisions to legislators.

**Michael A. Rebell**, executive director of the **Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE)**, the advocacy group that initially brought the lawsuit on behalf of New York City schoolchildren, was more concerned with whether the additional funding that the commission proposed would suffice. “I’m very skeptical,” he said. “I don’t know if the bottom of the range is enough to make any real difference.”

CFE released a report on March 30, which concluded that for students to be assured of an opportunity to achieve a Regents-level education in New York State will require an increased investment of \$6.6 billion to \$9.1 billion. Based on the study’s results, CFE projected a statewide education aid increase of \$9.5 billion, including building aid, was needed to bring all schools to adequacy level.

Read Governor Pataki’s press release about the commission at [http://www.state.ny.us/governor/press/year04/march29\\_04.htm](http://www.state.ny.us/governor/press/year04/march29_04.htm).

Read the *New York Times* article about the commission at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/30/nyregion/30SCHO.html>.



### **GAO REPORT URGES U.S. DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR AND EDUCATION TO WORK TOGETHER ON DROPOUTS**

A new report from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) is recommending that the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education coordinate efforts to clarify the ways in which schools can work with workforce officials to connect high school dropouts to youth services provided by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

The report, *Labor Actions Can Help States Improve Quality of Performance Outcome Data and Delivery of Youth Services*, notes that research has shown that young people can achieve positive outcomes when paired with caring adults, engaging in hands-on education and training activities, and receiving support for personal growth. The WIA program has sought to make these experiences available to both in-school and out-of school youth. It was enacted in 1998 as a way to help the nation’s emerging workforce realize its full potential and to help address unmet labor demands due to too few workers with the necessary skills. The program receives approximately \$1 billion annually and serves an estimated 721,000 of the nation’s most at-risk young people.

The report found that local WIA youth programs largely focused on preemptive strategies to help in-school youth avoid academic failure that often leads to dropping out of school. In fact, 70 percent of WIA programs serve in-school youth, half of whom received summer employment services that were linked to classroom learning. For example, a service provider in rural California enrolled in-school youth in a six-week summer enrichment program where students worked part-time while learning reading skills. One urban area in Virginia reported that “while a

local school provided one counselor for as many as 300 students, the WIA program funded one counselor for every fifty WIA participants.”

Out-of-school youth were difficult to identify because schools did not always ensure that dropouts were connected to the WIA program. Even when identified, out-of-school youth were more difficult to track down and often favored the money from immediate employment over WIA’s long-term youth development activities. Out-of-school youth who were served through the program were more likely to receive occupational skills training and supportive services, such as child care assistance, transportation, and housing, as opposed to in-school youth.

The complete report is available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04308.pdf>.

### **Spotlight on Educational Research**

#### **U.S. Department of Education to Fund Research Training in the Education Sciences**

In order to develop a new generation of researchers capable of producing scientific evidence that will guide education policy and classroom practice, the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences recently announced funding for graduate training programs in the education sciences.

Each of the new training grants will be funded for up to \$1 million per year for up to five years. Ten or more training grants could be awarded in the first year of the program. This program marks the first time that the U.S. Department of Education will provide significant support to colleges and universities to develop programs for students interested in pursuing careers in education research. Currently, schools of education are not producing sufficient numbers of researchers to meet the burgeoning demand for rigorous, quantitative research on the effectiveness of education programs and practices.

For more information, visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/edresearch/applicant.html#predoc04>.

#### **National High School Alliance Offers Catalog of Research on Secondary School Reform**

A new product, the Catalog of Research on Secondary School Reform (CoRSSR) is available online through the National High School Alliance. The online catalog, which will be continually updated, describes research that is currently in progress or has been recently completed but not yet published.

The featured research focuses on questions of implementation, effectiveness, and/or policy that specifically address one or more of the key attributes of effective schools, as identified by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation: common focus, high expectations, personalization, climate of respect and responsibility, time for teacher collaboration, performance-based assessment, and the use of technology.

Researchers interested in having their work included in the catalog should contact Monica Martinez, Project Director ([martinezm@iel.org](mailto:martinezm@iel.org)) Shayna Klopott, Research Associate ([klopotts@iel.org](mailto:klopotts@iel.org)) or Nina Frant, Program Assistant ([frantn@iel.org](mailto:frantn@iel.org)).

To access the catalog, visit <http://www.hsalliance.org/research/index.asp>.

**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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