



# Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **PREPARING, RECRUITING, AND RETAINING EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS: Senator Reed Proposes New \$500 Million Bill to Improve Teacher and Principal Quality**

A new bill by **Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI)** would authorize \$500 million for the Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants program of the Higher Education Act to enhance teacher recruitment, retention, preparation and professional development, and to provide support for teachers and principals. The bill would also add much-needed support for principals, early childhood education providers, and ongoing opportunities for educator training and retraining. The bill's residency program would provide an induction program for all new general education and special education teachers during their first three years on the job.

The current Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants program is much smaller. Senator Reed's bill—the Preparing, Recruiting, and Retaining Education Professionals (PRREP) Act of 2004, or S. 2335—would increase the program dramatically by increasing the funding directed to Partnership and Recruitment Grants. Teacher Recruitment Grants, which make up 10 percent of the current program, fund scholarships to help students pay the costs of tuition, room and board, and other expenses associated with completing a teacher preparation program.

“Highly qualified teachers are essential to providing students with a strong, quality education,” Reed said. “This bill will provide federal support to help school districts and state and local governments meet the needs of providing a quality education to students.”

Sen. Reed's PRREP Act is an innovative bill that helps to address the serious problem of high teacher turnover and lack of high-quality teachers, which is even more of a problem in high-poverty schools. According to a 2002 **Education Trust** study, 34 percent of teachers in high-poverty secondary schools lack subject matter expertise. In low-poverty secondary schools, 19 percent of teachers lack expertise in the subject they teach.

According to a four-year national evaluation of Partnership Grants, 75 percent of participating districts credit the program with improving recruitment, 61 percent credit the program with strengthening teacher qualifications, and 56 percent report reduced teacher attrition and turnover among newly hired teachers.

According to the **National Commission on Teaching and America's Future**, one of the primary reasons teachers leave the profession is lack of support. Additionally, data from the *2000 School and Staffing Survey* published by the **National Center of Education Statistics** show that within the first five years of teaching, 46 percent of new teachers leave the profession. The PRREP Act would create a residency induction program for new teachers, which would use

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effective, research-based best practices to provide ongoing training, mentoring, and professional development during a teacher's first three years of teaching.

Induction programs have been shown to improve the retention of new teachers and improve teacher quality. A study by **Richard Ingersoll, an associate professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania**, shows that teachers who participate in comprehensive induction programs have half the attrition rates as teachers who do not. Additional studies show that teachers in induction programs use practices that improve student achievement and motivate students to engage in productive learning activities.

For more information on the PRREP Act, including a press release and bill summary, visit <http://reed.senate.gov/press108th/Education/relprrepact04-22-04.htm>.



### **RAISING EXPECTATIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: New California Legislation Would Require “College Prep” Courses for All Students**

Under legislation introduced in the California State Senate last month, all California high school students would have to take courses currently required only for college-bound students. The bill, introduced by **Sen. Richard Alarcon (D)** and sponsored by **Jack O’Connell, the state schools chief**, would require students to take the minimum requirements for admission for a California state university campus. The requirement would be voluntary until 2010 but become mandatory thereafter.

In defending the need for the legislation, O’Connell noted that far too many of the state’s high school students were not prepared to enter the workforce, continue on to college, or even “become effective citizens.” “All of our students need the skills once reserved for our college-bound students,” he said.

According to *Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K–12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations*, released by Stanford University’s Bridge Project last year, 88 percent of eighth graders expect to participate in some form of postsecondary education, and approximately 70 percent of high school graduates actually do go to college within two years of graduating. However, less than 12 percent of high school students know what curriculum they need to prepare themselves for the rigors of postsecondary education. In addition, the report found that many students are shocked to discover they need remediation at the beginning of their postsecondary education only three months after graduating from high school. In California, 58 percent of the 38,086 freshmen who enrolled in the California state university system in the fall of 2003 did not have basic English and math skills.

The bill would free up approximately \$450 million in funds that would otherwise be restricted to specific purposes such as teacher training, textbooks, dropout prevention, and library funds. Under the legislation, schools would use this money to increase access to advanced courses, invest in training to help teachers teach the advanced subject matter, purchase textbooks that are

more aligned with state standards, and improve the transitions between middle school, high school, and college.

Read “Bill Raises Expectations for State’s High School Students” at <http://www.conracoostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/living/education/8482171.htm>.



## **TAX PLAN WOULD REAP MILLIONS FOR VIRGINIA SCHOOLS: Virginia House and Senate Negotiate Compromise on Tax Increase**

Last week, the Republican-controlled Virginia General Assembly passed a \$1.36 billion tax increase that will mean more money for education and other state programs than the \$1 billion tax plan that **Virginia Gov. Mark Warner (D)** proposed late last year.

Warner’s plan proposed to generate \$1 billion in new state money, including \$715 million for basic school aid, by increasing the state sales tax by one cent and raising taxes on cigarettes and on individuals who earn over \$100,000 annually.

“For too long, Virginia has failed to pay its fair share for public schools, putting pressure on local governments to raise property taxes to pick up the slack,” Warner said. “At the same time, as Virginia grows, more and more students are entering our schools every year at all levels, from preschool to graduate school.”

The plan that passed the legislature will increase the state’s sales tax by one-half of a penny; increase the cigarette tax from 2.5 cents per pack to 30 cents a pack; and gradually reduce the tax on groceries. It will also limit income tax breaks for corporations and some older Virginians while increasing fees on recording real estate deeds.

In supporting the tax increases, a group of maverick Republicans bucked the party leadership and went against several antitax groups that have vowed primary challenges when the delegates seek reelection next year. One opposition group, **Citizens for a Sound Economy**, led by former **House Majority Leader Dick Armey**, has already seen success in fighting back tax increases for additional education spending. In Alabama, the group worked to defeat a \$1.2 billion tax increase package proposed by **Alabama Gov. Bob Riley (R)** that would have helped erase the state’s budget shortfall, shifted the tax burden from the poor to the rich, and improved public education in the state.

These antitax efforts were countered by a massive public relations campaign and heavy lobbying by groups representing teachers, the state police, and health care organizations.

“This has to be one of the most critical votes in the history of the commonwealth,” **Sen. H. Russell Potts Jr. (R)** told the *Washington Post*. “We have taken a bold step in making sure that future obligations are funded and future generations are adequately cared for.”

Read “Virginia Passes Landmark Increases in Taxes” at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A46654-2004Apr27.html>.



## MAYORAL CONTROL A NO GO: Washington, D.C., Council Rejects Mayor's Request for Management of City Schools

On April 20, by a nine-to-four vote, the D.C. Council rejected legislation that would have placed **Mayor Anthony Williams** in direct control of the city's school system, and instead decided to make every member of the school board an elected official. In defeating the mayor's plan, several council members criticized Williams's management of several city agencies, especially those that deal with children, which are already under his control.

If it had been accepted, the legislation would have given Williams the power to hire and fire the school superintendent (who would have been called chancellor) and would have allowed him to have the final say in all management issues of the 64,000-student school system.

In the days leading up to the vote, Mayor Williams received support from **Joel I. Klein, chancellor of schools in New York City**. Several years ago, New York City granted control of its school system to Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

"A school chancellor or chief executive officer must have the full confidence and backing of the mayor, and be accountable to the mayor," Klein wrote in an op-ed in the *Washington Post*. "Why? The reality is that an entrenched school system develops its own hierarchy of beneficiaries, and it will stubbornly avoid accountability and resist change—even when change is critically needed and painfully obvious."

Klein credited mayoral control of New York City's schools for a streamlined administration that allowed transferring \$250 million out of the bureaucracy and instead spending the money on math and literacy coaches, and on twelve hundred parent coordinators, who reached out to families and brought about greater involvement in their children's education.

In a rally two days before the final vote, Mayor Williams said that if he were given control of the schools and did not meet certain measurable goals within one year, he would resign. Ultimately, that promise wasn't enough to convince council members. As **member Phil Mendelson** told the *Washington Post*, "The idea of change for change's sake is foolhardy, and that's really what's underlying the proponents. . . . 'We can't do any worse, so let's blow it up again.'"

The April 20 vote was preliminary; a final vote is not expected until May 4. However, the mayor has said that he would consider vetoing the plan for an all-elected panel. The council would have to come up with nine votes to override his veto.

Last week, the D.C. school board drew fire from a *Washington Post* editorial for approving a bonus of \$33,750 to outgoing Interim Superintendent Elfreda W. Massie on her last day of work. "We would like to think that school board members would have taken the step of adding a \$33,750 bonus to the \$74,000 Ms. Massie had already earned, in five short months of work, *only* after they were absolutely certain that no child, teacher, or principal was being forced to do without the tools necessary for a proper education."

Read “Williams’s School Plan Defeated” at  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A27659-2004Apr20.html>.

Read “Give Schools to the Mayor” at  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A25794-2004Apr19.html>.

Read “That School Board” at  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45016-2004Apr26.html>.



## **SCHOOLS AS CENTERS OF COMMUNITY: KnowledgeWorks Begins National Search for Excellence**

In the next five years, school districts across the country will spend more than \$120 billion to build thousands of new facilities. According to the **KnowledgeWorks Foundation**, if these new schools are planned and designed with the community in mind, they will not only reflect the democratic aspirations of the American people that all children receive an excellent education, but will also serve as community learning centers for decades to come.

In *Schools as Centers of Community: Citizen’s Guide for Planning and Design*, the **National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities** and KnowledgeWorks present a systematic planning approach that can result in the successful development of schools as centers of communities. It outlines basic principles for designing such schools and case studies of successful projects.

For example, Gaylord High School in Michigan serves twelve hundred students in grades 9–12, but also houses a daycare facility, community healthcare clinics, and higher education classes. The school’s performing arts center serves the entire community. As a result, students interact daily with a broad range of community members and the Gaylord community has developed a strong vested interest in its school.

As part of School Building Week (April 19–23), KnowledgeWorks launched a national search for excellent schools that capture the growing trend to build schools as centers of community. A selection committee comprised of former **U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley**, **Coalition for Community Schools Executive Director Martin J. Blank**, and other experts in the fields of school design, school/community partnerships, and community development will review entries in the National Search for Excellence. These schools will join the foundation’s Schools as Centers of Community Honor Society, and one school among them will be selected to receive the KnowledgeWorks Foundation’s Award for Excellence, and be given a \$5,000 grant.

Entries will be accepted through July 23, 2004. The announcement of the Honor Society and the Award for Excellence will occur at the KnowledgeWorks Foundation’s annual conference on September 28.

For more information on selection criteria and directions for entering, visit  
<http://www.kwfdn.org/ProgramAreas/Facilities/builder.html>.

## **Many Students Need Alternative Pathways to Finishing School: Successful JAG and YouthBuild Programs Target Out-of-School Youth and At-Risk High School Students**

**Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG)** works to provide at-risk high school students with classroom and work-based learning experiences that enable them to obtain a quality job, leading to a career after their graduation or completion of a GED. Typically, the program achieves a 90 percent graduation rate among its participants. Among program graduates, 80 percent are employed, attending a postsecondary institution, or have become member of the military.

JAG currently has twenty-seven chartered state organizations that work with more than eight hundred high schools, alternative schools, community colleges, and middle schools across the country. The JAG Model is a highly accountable program that provides work-based learning experiences that will lead to career advancement opportunities or enrollment in a postsecondary institution. At the same time, JAG uses several support structures to ensure that participants stay in school, including a student-led Career Association for members to develop, practice, and refine their personal, leadership, and career skills.

While the original JAG Model applications served high school seniors only, it has since grown to include a dropout-prevention program application that works with students in grades 9–12, and a dropout-recovery program application that serves young people who have left the traditional school system and enrolled in an alternative school or a community-college based program leading to a high school diploma or GED.

To learn more about Jobs for America’s Graduates, visit <http://www.jag.org/>.

In two hundred **YouthBuild** programs across the nation, unemployed young Americans aged sixteen to twenty-four are rebuilding their lives as they rebuild their communities. An example of a successful alternative pathway to college and success, YouthBuild alternates weeks of traditional classes with weeks of onsite construction training for a nine- to twelve-month period. For participants, the program is a way to resume their education with the goal of receiving a high school diploma while also benefiting from training, education, counseling, and leadership development. For the community, YouthBuild translates into much-needed affordable homes for the homeless or low-income families. Over the past ten years, more than forty thousand YouthBuild participants have built more than twelve thousand housing units in their neighborhoods.

YouthBuild combines the features of many successful programs—integration of academic skills with vocational training, small classes that provide one-on-one attention, and post-program training. Successful participants receive references and recommendations for future employment. In 2001, 84 percent of the participants entered the program without a GED or diploma and 90 percent were from low-income families. More than three-quarters of the participants are high school dropouts. At the time of their entrance into the program, participants read at the seventh-grade level, on average. YouthBuild has a graduation rate of approximately 59 percent, and almost 82 percent of participants who successfully completed the academic program were placed in jobs or college after graduation.

The academic program is designed to prepare students for a high school equivalency exam, at minimum. Program participants alternate a week of classes with a week of onsite construction training. With this format, the program integrates academic skills such as reading, writing, and math with more general “life skills” such as leadership development, civic education, and money management.

In the early 1990s, **Rep. Major Owens (D-NY)** and **Sen. John Kerry (D-MA)** introduced legislation that resulted in the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992’s “Hope for Youth: YouthBuild.” Since then, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has awarded YouthBuild grants and contracts totaling more than \$400 million. In fiscal 2003, Congress appropriated \$60 million to HUD’s YouthBuild program and HUD awarded 106 grants.

More information on YouthBuild is available at <http://www.youthbuild.org/>.



## ALLIANCE EVALUATES PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' PROPOSALS TO INCREASE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

Both **George Bush** and **John Kerry** want to improve the nation's public education system, and they currently have proposals before the public—and, in President Bush's case, before Congress—that merit serious consideration.

A new policy brief by the **Alliance for Excellent Education** compares George Bush and John Kerry's positions on education reform as they impact America's secondary schools and students. As the country faces the need for an increasingly skilled and educated workforce to remain internationally competitive and productive, it is critical that policymakers at all levels of government concentrate on high schools, a vital part of that equation.

The Alliance's brief examines publicly available information on President Bush's and Senator Kerry's plans (as of April 21, 2004) by topic areas, including reading and math; teachers and principals; college preparation; the No Child Left Behind Act; federal funding; and school environment and facilities. The candidates' proposals to improve literacy, increase college readiness and access, improve teacher and principal quality, and encourage teachers to work in high-needs schools are among the analyzed plans. The Alliance will update the brief as new proposals are put forth.

The next president of the United States—regardless of party affiliation—has a historic role to play in the process of assuring that effective, targeted programs are available to help our nation's secondary school students graduate from high school prepared for college and success in life. This year's presidential candidates are beginning to address this important issue. However, transforming America's high schools and increasing graduation rates must be a high priority for the next president and include substantial new efforts sufficient to meet the needs of millions of young adults currently at risk of failure.

Read the Alliance's press release and access the complete report at [http://www.all4ed.org/press/pr\\_042104.html](http://www.all4ed.org/press/pr_042104.html)

**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.



1201 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Suite 901  
Washington, DC 20005

Phone 202 828-0828  
Fax 202 828-0821  
Alliance@all4ed.org  
www.all4ed.org

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Susan Frost, President  
Jason Amos, Associate Editor

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