



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress

Editor's Note: This issue of *Straight A's* contains a special insert that outlines the proposed spending totals for education programs that help middle and high school students as included in the president's FY 2006 budget request and in the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending bill approved by the House Appropriations Committee.



HOUSE COMMITTEE APPROVES EDUCATION FUNDING BILL: Striving Readers Program Would Receive \$5 Million Increase

On June 16, the House Appropriations Committee approved \$56.7 billion for the U.S. Department of Education, an increase of \$117 million over last year, in its FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education spending bill. The education spending bill is expected to go to the House floor during the week of June 20, with the Senate Appropriations Committee marking up its version sometime in July. The final numbers will not be known until the president signs the bill, which is not likely before fall.

"We've done the best we could with the money we have," said **House Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula (R-OH)**, who expressed particular concern over education programs. "That's the future of our nation, to have well-educated people. That's how we will be able to compete."

Representative David Obey (D-WI) accused Republicans of running up big budget deficits to "provide super-sized, six-digit tax cuts to the most fortunate people in our society," while forcing Congress to "produce the kind of cuts we see in this bill."

Title I and special education, which saw jumps in funding of up to \$1 billion each in past years, would receive much smaller increases under the House bill. Title I, funded at \$12.74 billion last year, would receive only \$100 million more in FY 2006—far less than the \$500 million increase proposed by President Bush. Special education would receive a \$150 million boost in the House bill, compared to the \$358 million increase that Bush sought in his budget request.

Rather than provide large increases for these kinds of big-ticket items, Regula chose to fund smaller programs that had been slated for elimination in the president's budget request. For example, Even Start (\$200 million), Comprehensive School Reform (\$10 million), the National Writing Project (\$20 million), Elementary and Secondary School Counseling (\$34.7 million), and Smaller Learning Communities (\$94.5 million) were all funded in the appropriations committee bill despite being "zeroed out" in the president's proposed budget. Both TRIO, which was cut by \$467 million in the president's budget, and GEAR UP, which was zeroed out, were restored to last year's funding levels in the House bill. Vocational Education State Grants (Perkins) was another program that was pegged for elimination by the president in order to

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provide funding for a new high school initiative. Under the committee-passed bill, funding for Perkins was restored to \$1.19 billion, the same amount the program received last year. The high school initiative—which had been considered by many as “dead on arrival” when it was proposed back in February—now appears to be officially ready for burial.

The Striving Readers program, which will enter its second year of existence in FY 2006, was funded at \$30 million in the House bill. In a statement, **Bob Wise, the president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, commended the appropriations committee for “recognizing the importance of improving the reading and writing skills of American secondary school students,” but noted that the appropriation fell far short of the \$200 million President Bush requested in his budget. “If the ongoing investment of \$1 billion a year in No Child Left Behind’s Reading First program, which focuses on students in grades K–3, is to have a lasting effect, literacy skills must be reinforced and expanded throughout a student’s academic life,” Wise said.



ROLE OF NONPROFITS IN HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: Congress Content to Watch High School Reform Efforts from the Sidelines

On June 9, the House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Education Reform held a hearing to learn about ways nonprofit organizations are helping to support and encourage state and local high school reform efforts. The hearing, the second in a series on high school reform, featured testimony from representatives from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation of New York. Members of the subcommittee, while asking the witnesses to advise them on what the federal role in high school reform should be, remained skeptical that Congress should play a more active part.

In his opening statement, **Representative Michael N. Castle (R-DE), chairman of the Subcommittee on Education Reform**, acknowledged the challenges confronting American high schools, saying, “High school is no longer about simply moving students from ninth grade to graduation. We now must ensure all students are leaving their secondary education with the skills necessary to reach their next goal. Whether that goal is college, the military, or to enter the workforce does not matter—all students now need the basic skills to excel.”

Castle also noted the problems facing many high schools and their students. He said that 30 percent of all students do not graduate from high school and that graduation rates for African-American and Hispanic students hover around 50 percent. He also pointed out that too many American high school students struggle in reading and math.

Although Castle admitted that these statistics painted a similar picture to what Congress saw in elementary schools prior to the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, he fell short of calling for an increased federal role in the improvement of high schools. “I am not yet sure if there is a federal role, or what that role would be, but continue to be committed to learning more and doing whatever I can to make this part of the education reform dialogue,” he said.

Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, the top Democrat on the subcommittee, hinted in her opening statement that the Congress could become more active at the high school level after

gathering information from individuals already in the trenches. “High school reform has not been a really hot topic in Washington, but it’s something that the Congress is looking at becoming more involved in,” she said. “As we move forward, I’m hoping that we’ll have the opportunity to hear from school administrators, teachers, parents, and certainly students about their experiences.”

Representative George Miller, ranking member of the full Education and the Workforce Committee, applauded the partnership between governors and nonprofit organizations and said he would like to see Congress contribute money to the effort. “I . . . hope to be able at some point to convince the Congress that we should put in some matching money [to] encourage more of this effort,” he said. Believing that the federal government will have a role to play in high schools, Miller said that encouraging these types of partnerships could produce evidence that could guide the Congress and shorten the time frame of when and how the federal government should involve itself in high school outcomes.

In his testimony, **Tom Vander Ark, executive director of education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, said that the Gates Foundation has invested approximately \$1 billion over the last five years to help spur innovation and focus the country on the goal of ensuring that all students graduate from high school ready for college, work, and citizenship. He said the federal government should promote more valid and reliable accountability for high schools, including more accurate definitions of graduation rates, and give “ample consideration” to the president’s proposed high school reform initiatives, particularly its call for individual student learning plans and a teacher incentive fund.

“If the United States is going to continue to lead the world economically, and if every child is going to have the opportunity to rise to his or her potential, then we must fundamentally redesign our high schools to prepare all students for the twenty-first century,” he said.

Shifting from a national focus to efforts underway in individual states, **Deborah Howard, program director for school improvement at the KnowledgeWorks Foundation**, shared information on the Ohio Early College Network and the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative. Through these programs, which impact more than 25,000 students in some of Ohio’s most economically challenged urban and rural areas, KnowledgeWorks is working to create a “tipping point” for high school reform statewide.

Recognizing that the inequities of the current system are most pronounced in high schools, Carnegie Corporation of New York has chosen to focus its resources in this area, where there is the most strategic opportunity for change. “School districts often make gains at the elementary and middle school level that are eroded at the high school level,” said **Andrés Henríquez, program officer for Carnegie Corporation of New York**. After inviting twenty school districts to submit plans for reform, Carnegie selected seven to participate in Schools for a New Society, an initiative that “calls upon cities to take on the challenge of creating a system of good high schools—schools in which all students could be successfully prepared for postsecondary education, employment, and democratic citizenship,” Henríquez said.

Henríquez also spoke about the importance of intermediate and adolescent literacy and noted that no consensus has emerged on how to teach reading beyond grade three. “Poor reading skills in

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high school have roots in a system that provides little systemic support for readers beyond the age of eight,” he said. “We believe there is strong evidence that schools with a focus on literacy (reading and writing) are associated with improved academic performance and successful academic outcomes for students. At the Corporation, we are making grants aimed at having a profound influence on adolescent literacy by directing national attention to the issue, bringing together the best talent in the field to address the issue, and supporting needed research and innovative practices.”

In May, the Education and the Workforce Committee invited **Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney (R)** and **Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack (D)** to testify on high school reform efforts being spearheaded at the state level and to discuss national partnerships being formed among governors and private nonprofit groups dedicated to education reform. (Go to <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/StraightAs/Volume5No10.html#Water> for more details.)

Until it begins to hear from the American public and a groundswell of public opinion joins the push from governors, foundations, and nonprofits to reform America’s high schools, Congress appears content to sit back and wait while the high school crisis remains unresolved. Meanwhile, every school day another 7,000 students will drop out.

“There is a unique window of opportunity to redesign the American high school for the twenty-first century, and it is imperative—for both individual students and our nation—that we seize this opportunity and spur change at the local, state, and federal levels,” Vander Ark told the members of the subcommittee. “We—national nonprofit organizations, concerned community members, policymakers at all levels, parents, educators, and others—cannot afford to let this window of opportunity close without drawing upon our common visions, best experiences, and lessons learned to ensure that all students have access to high-quality high schools.”

Witness testimony and Chairman Castle’s opening statement are available at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/hearings/109th/edr/highschool060905/wl060905.htm>.



MAKING PROGRESS TOWARD GRADUATION: Talent Development High School Reform Model Produces Substantial Gains in Philadelphia High Schools

Talent Development, a high school reform model that targets some of the most troubled schools in the nation, produced substantial gains in attendance, academic course credits earned, and ninth-grade promotion rates for students in very low-performing schools in Philadelphia, according to a new report from MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, social policy research organization. The report, *Making Progress Toward Graduation: Evidence from the Talent Development High School Model*, also found evidence that Talent Development helped to raise eleventh-grade math test scores and high school graduation rates.

“Educational reformers need good evidence about what works in order to make a lasting difference in American high schools,” said **Gordon Berlin, president of MDRC**. “These Talent Development findings are unusually rigorous, and they describe a model that is uncommonly effective across a variety of educational outcomes.”

During the 1990s, Philadelphia high schools suffered from high dropout rates and low student achievement. More than 75 percent of the city’s students entered the ninth grade with reading and math skills below grade level, and over half could be considered chronic absentees (absent over 20 percent of the time). In addition, fewer than two-thirds of ninth graders were promoted to tenth grade, and fewer than 40 percent were on schedule to graduate four years after beginning high school. At the start of the 2003–04 school year, the Talent Development model was in place in seven of the district’s twenty-two nonselective high schools. The report focuses on the five high schools that started using the model first.

The Talent Development model is designed to raise the expectations of teachers and students and has the ultimate goal of preparing all students for postsecondary education and employment. It targets the ninth-grade year and the transition into tenth grade, generally considered the weakest point in the educational system.

“Ninth grade is the largest leak in the educational pipeline, where struggling students often fail to make the transition from middle school to high school,” said **James J. Kemple, director of MDRC’s K–12 Education Policy Area and lead author of the report**. “Talent Development eases the way for students during this ‘make-or-break’ year both by strengthening instruction in math and English and by changing the structure of school to make it feel smaller and more personalized.”

According to the report, the Talent Development schools made immediate changes to the structure and instructional core of the entire ninth grade. They relocated all ninth-grade classes to a single floor or wing in order to create “learning communities”—small, self-contained academic teams of 100 to 125 students who were taught exclusively by the same four or five teachers. In addition, each school modified its daily schedule to include blocks of four 80- to 90-minute classes that allowed students to take “double doses” of math and English over the course of the school year.

“Creating smaller communities of learners to overcome the anonymity of the large urban high school is necessary, but it may not be sufficient. High school reformers must also tackle what gets taught and how it is taught,” Berlin said.

As a result of Talent Development, “strong positive impacts” occurred during the ninth-grade year. The report found that attendance rates in the Talent Development schools improved by an average of five percentage points—about nine extra school days per year—when compared to schools operating without the model. In addition, Talent Development schools also increased the percentage of students who completed a “basic academic curriculum”—at least five credits during the school year, with three of those credits being in math, English, and science. Talent Development also produced an increase of twenty-five percentage points in the proportion of students who earned a credit in algebra and helped raise ninth-grade promotion rates by nearly 10 percent.

Beyond the ninth-grade year, students also saw sustained impacts on credits earned and promotion rates as they moved through high school, with higher eleventh-grade promotion rates, higher eleventh-grade math scores, and an eight-percentage-point gain in graduation rates.

Talent Development High School Reform Model Produces Substantial Gains in Philadelphia High Schools (Continued from p. 5)

Even with Talent Development’s substantial and persistent positive impacts, Philadelphia schools still have a long way to go before all students will be adequately prepared for graduation, postsecondary education, and employment. “A typical ninth-grader will still miss about 40 days of school, nearly a third will not be promoted to the tenth grade, and more than half of first-time ninth-grade students will not be ready to graduate in four years,” the report reads. To improve these numbers, the Talent Development model “continues to evolve by strengthening the upper-grade components—particularly by extending curricular and instructional reforms to tenth and eleventh grades.”

In conclusion, the report found encouraging evidence that real improvements can be made in some of the lowest-performing high schools in the country, “if there exists a sustained investment in developing the skills to deal with poorly prepared students and weak learning environments, and if that investment is built on reasonable fidelity to the tenets and components of a well-conceived reform approach.”

The complete report is available at <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/408/overview.html>.



PREPARING AND TRAINING PROFESSIONALS: New Report Compares Professional Development Across Education, Law, Accounting, Architecture, Nursing, Firefighting, and Law Enforcement

The No Child Left Behind Act and its requirements for “highly qualified” teachers and 100 percent student proficiency in reading and math by 2014 have focused attention on the need to improve teacher quality. However, “many stakeholders concede that traditional teacher preparation and in-service training have failed to produce the level of quality demanded by the new educational environment,” according to *Preparing and Training Professionals: Comparing Education to Six Other Fields*. This new report from the Finance Project, a nonprofit policy research organization whose mission is to support decisionmaking that produces and sustains good results for children, families, and communities, compares professional development—both preservice and in-service—in education to six other professions: law, accounting, architecture, nursing, firefighting, and law enforcement.

“The education field is not alone in its quest for quality,” the report reads. “Information about how other fields prepare and train professionals can help advance efforts to tap the potential of professional development to improve teacher quality and strengthen the education system.”

When examining “on the job” training, the report notes that student teaching is required before licensure, but says that student teachers often give their experience a falling grade, calling it “limited, inconsistent, and disconnected from coursework.” It suggests that the education field should study the “more intensive and highly structured programs used by nursing and architecture” to inform efforts to make the student teaching experience more valuable.

In architecture, for example, prospective architects must obtain their college degree and then complete a field internship under the direct supervision of a registered architect. They must also

successfully complete a nine-part examination. New nurses must participate in an orientation process that includes a mentoring component from a veteran nurse. “Orientations include an introduction to both agency policies and procedures, a possible overview of hospital politics, and a review of skills, which is sometimes accompanied by a final examination,” the report reads.

In *Tapping the Potential*, the Alliance for Excellent Education wrote that placing new teachers in the most challenging classrooms without comprehensive induction—and expecting them to perform like experienced teachers—is like putting newly licensed drivers behind the wheel in a NASCAR race. Despite the added challenges that come with teaching children and adolescents with higher needs, most beginning teachers are given no professional support, feedback, or demonstration of what it takes to help their students succeed. The result is that new teachers are most at risk of leaving the teaching profession. In fact, 14 percent of new teachers leave by the end of their first year, and almost 50 percent leave in five years.

Compare the plight of new teachers with their counterparts in other professions: according to *Preparing and Training Professionals*, “clinical experiences and induction programs in education are less structured and less consistently supervised than those in some other fields.” It notes that novice firefighters, police, and nurses all complete formal orientation or induction programs to prepare them for the demanding situations they will face. “Since research shows that quality induction programs can prepare teachers and reduce turnover, examining universally required programs in other fields could provide valuable models,” the report reads.

The report also notes several instances in which the teaching profession is alone in its methodology. While many of the other fields require a passing score on a national exam, the education field “has long resisted a national teacher assessment and continues to rely on varied state standards for licensure.” Education also “stands alone” in allowing professionals to practice independently before they are licensed. In the legal world, law school graduates must pass a state bar before practicing law, and in accounting, certified public accountants must sit for the CPA exam. Finally, education is the only field of the seven that requires its managers—principals and superintendents—to obtain a separate licensure before assuming a management role.

The report did note several instances where the education field was working to align its professional development practices more closely to other professions. For example, educators are increasingly looking for ways to provide and expand opportunities for teacher collaboration, common planning time, peer learning, and teamwork. In law, accounting, and architecture, networking and professional associations are “critical tools for business and professional development while police and firefighters place a premium on peer support and team building.”

The complete report is available at
<http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/publications/preparingprofessionals.pdf>.

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 20036

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

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Bob Wise
President
Jason Amos
Editor

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