



# StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## SENATE APPROVES BUDGET PLAN: Amendment Adds Funds for Education Programs

Every year, the U.S. Congress considers multiple appropriations measures that provide funding for activities and agencies for the next fiscal year, including specific education programs and the U.S. Department of Education. The first step in this lengthy process is the submission by the president of his annual budget for the upcoming fiscal year (see the February 7 issue of *Straight A's* for details on this year's presidential budget request). Next, the Senate and the House of Representatives approve budget "resolutions," or plans, that serve as blueprints for members of Congress to use as they consider specific spending decisions. The annual congressional budget resolution is not binding, nor is it signed by the president.

On Thursday, March 16, the U.S. Senate narrowly approved its fiscal year 2007 budget resolution, with a final vote of 51–49. The original proposal, submitted to the full Senate for consideration by the Budget Committee, was changed during debate—and following a vigorous effort by education and health advocacy organizations—to include additional funding for education, labor, and health programs. Enjoying considerable bipartisan support, that amendment passed on a 73–27 vote.

Offered by **Senators Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Tom Harkin (D-IA), the chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee**, the amendment added \$7 billion to the pool of money available for the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Labor, thus restoring funding to the fiscal year 2005 level. Discussing the need for the amendment, Specter cited the drastic cuts to these programs over the last few years: "We have done more than cut out the fat, we have done more than cut through the muscle, we have done more than cut through the bone; we have cut into the marrow," he said.

Specter cited the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, GEAR UP, and the Perkins Vocational and Technical Education program as examples of some of the programs that could benefit from the additional money. The amendment would also help appropriators avoid cutting other education initiatives such as Striving Readers, Title I, or special education.

"This is not a radical proposal. In fact, it is almost an embarrassingly modest proposal," Senator Harkin said. "But it is important. It is an important first step. At least we are saying it is enough, no more; it is time to reorder our priorities ... President Bush, in his budget, proposed to slash

## **Senate Considers Education Budget** (Continued from p. 1)

the Labor-Health-Education budget by \$4.2 billion for this year. Meanwhile, in Iraq, he is spending nearly \$5 billion a month. These are not the priorities of the American people.”

Without the Specter/Harkin amendment, the Departments of Labor, Health, and Education were expected to have had \$4.2 billion less to spend on domestic programs than last year.

**Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg (R-NH)** spoke against the Specter/Harkin amendment on the Senate floor, noting that the Senate Budget Committee had already taken \$3 billion from defense and moved it to the Labor-HHS-Education Committee to be split equally between education and health care. However, appropriators would have still been subject to the president’s overall \$873 billion spending cap, which proposes to cut education by \$2.1 billion and eliminate 42 education programs, including vocational education, TRIO, GEAR UP, and Smaller Learning Communities.

Senator Specter expressed concern about whether the budget would ultimately reflect the will of Congress to increase support for education and health, saying, “As I have advised the leadership, I have grave doubts about supporting the budget resolution, even with the adoption of this amendment. I put the Republican leadership and the Democratic leadership and the House and the White House and the Presiding Officer, everyone on notice that I will want to see some real assurances that we are dealing with hard money ...” After his amendment passed, Specter received assurances from Senator Gregg and **Senate Appropriations Chairman Thad Cochran (R-MS)** that his committee would, in fact, receive and be able to allocate the additional money that the amendment made available.

## **Budget Resolution Exposes Divide Between House Moderates and Conservatives**

On the other side of the Capitol, the House Budget Committee postponed consideration of its version of the budget resolution until the week of March 27. The House version is expected to mirror the president’s overall spending cap of \$873 billion, but that does not mean that all House Republicans are happy with it.

On March 8, the Republican Study Committee (RSC), a group of more than 100 House conservatives, released a renewed Contract With America that calls for reducing the federal deficit by nearly \$400 billion over 5 years. Their budget proposal for fiscal year 2007 would cut about \$1 trillion from the \$2.77 trillion plan President Bush released in February. Within education, the RSC plan would cut Title I, and eliminate funding for afterschool and dropout-prevention programs and TRIO, to name only a few.

In contrast, moderate House Republicans are very worried about cuts in spending—especially given that this is an election year. Already, **Representative Michael Castle (R-DE)** has expressed opposition to the president’s budget, saying that it would continue large spending increases for the Pentagon while squeezing important domestic programs. On March 16, in a letter to **House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL)**, 23 moderate Republicans threatened to oppose the House version of the budget resolution, which is still being developed, unless it includes a 2% increase, or about \$8 billion, for domestic discretionary spending.

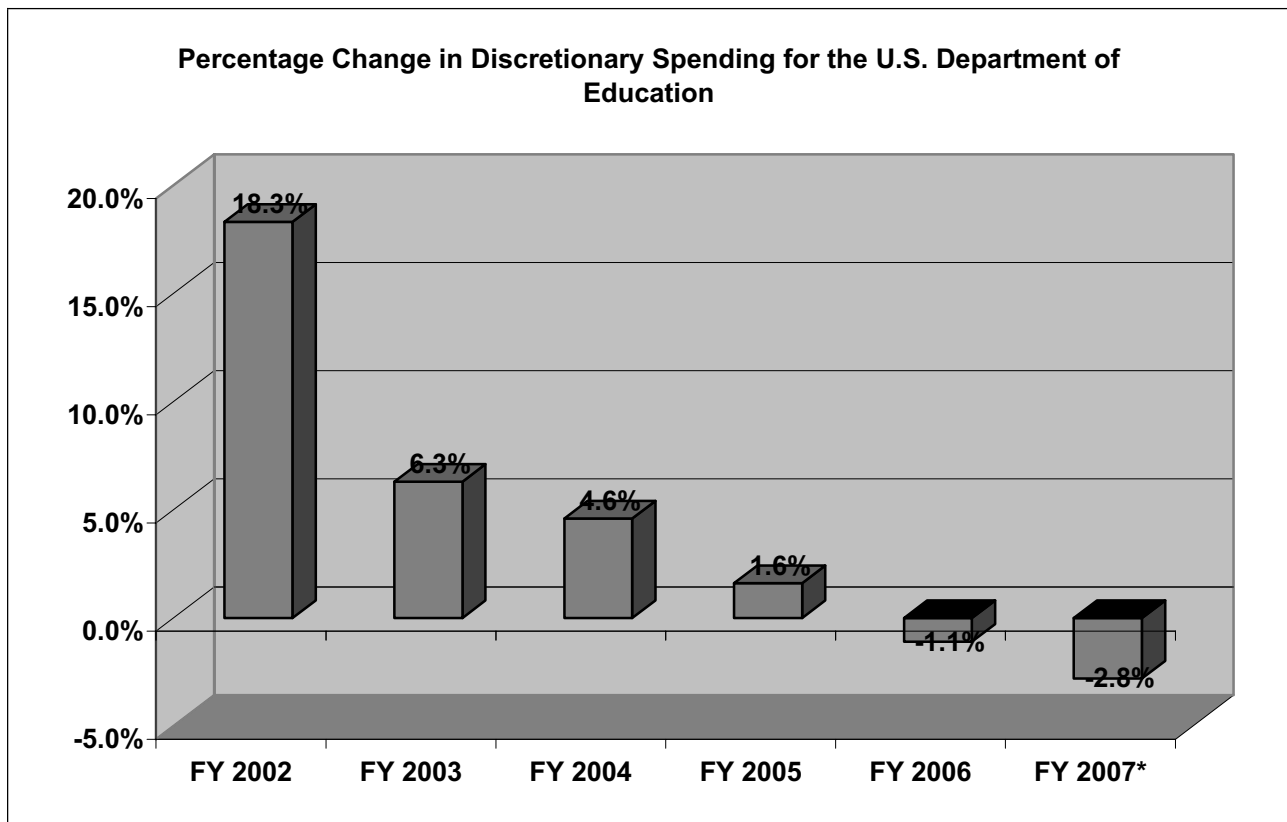


## THE HITS KEEP COMING: House Appropriations Subcommittee Criticizes President's Education Budget for Fiscal Year 2007

Two weeks ago, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings defended President Bush's budget request for education before the Senate subcommittee that handles education appropriations. At the hearing, "scandalous," "insufficient," and "simply underfunded" were some of the words that subcommittee members used to describe the education budget. On March 9, in an appearance before the House Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education Appropriations Subcommittee, Secretary Spellings heard many of the same complaints.

"We are proposing significant increases in key areas, as well as substantial savings from reductions in other programs," Spellings said. "The result would be a discretionary total that is up more than \$12 billion, or 29%, since fiscal year 2001."

While Secretary Spellings is correct, the lion's share of the increase came in fiscal year 2002, right after the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law. Recent years, including President Bush's budget request for fiscal year 2007, reveal a far different picture, as the chart below illustrates.



**Source:** U.S. Department of Education, *Summary of ED Discretionary Funding FY 2001–2007*, available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget07/summary/appendix1.pdf>.

The declining percentages in the chart above have been a source of frustration for many members of Congress, particularly **Representative David Obey (D-WI), the top Democrat on the subcommittee**. In his opening statement at the hearing, Obey admitted that he was "more

## House Appropriations Subcommittee Criticizes President's Education Budget

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frustrated” with the administration on education than on any other issue. He gave President Bush credit for “living up to the deal” of No Child Left Behind in the first year of the law, but pointed out that the increases in education spending have been on the decline every year since and have culminated in a decrease for fiscal year 2007.

Obey also noted that the administration is selling its \$1.5 billion high school initiative as new money, but said that roughly \$200 million to \$250 million is for testing, and that \$535 million in spending for TRIO and \$1.2 billion for spending for vocation and technical education were eliminated. He concluded by saying that, by his calculations, there “ain’t no new money in that transaction for high schools.”

After Obey expressed his misgivings about the president’s budget, **Representative Mike Simpson (R-ID)** mentioned that this hearing was the first time that he could remember agreeing with something Representative Obey said. Simpson went on to say that “education is the most important thing we do,” and took issues with the president’s cuts to TRIO and vocational education, saying that both of those programs were achieving results. He also spoke about a perceived “blind spot” in the way the department handles No Child Left Behind. He said that the department should be more open to “common sense changes” about modifying the law. As a result, he said he was hesitant to embrace the president’s High School Initiative, which would extend assessments and other requirements into high schools.

In response to a question from **Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula (R-OH)** on high schools and student performance, Secretary Spellings noted that there is a “positive trend line” in the early grades, but that student performance in high school is “flatter than a pancake” and has been for 30 years.

To help improve high schools, Spellings expressed a need for more information and data about what is going on in high schools. She also expressed a need for more rigor and remediation and said that the president’s Striving Readers and Striving Math programs were designed to catch up students who performed below grade level. “When kids arrive in ninth grade reading at a fourth-grade level, they can’t consume the coursework, become disaffected, and drop out,” she said.

Chairman Regula also noted that the president’s budget would eliminate funding for 42 education programs and asked how the department determined which programs to cut. In addition to making funding decisions based on the department’s Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), Spellings said that the president targeted programs that were “small in nature” and “didn’t get to a critical mass in scale.” She seemed to use \$25 million as a cutoff point and said that it was hard to see “real reform at the national level” when a program only received \$25 million annually.

Secretary Spellings’s comments are available at <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2006/03/03092006.html>.



## **IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES: Alliance Symposium Focuses on Importance of Data to Closing the Achievement Gap and Successfully Reforming Schools**

More than 100 educators, policymakers, researchers, and advocates attended the Alliance for Excellent Education's symposium on March 9 and 10 to discuss the critical role of data in improving educational outcomes. Speakers ranging from **Tom Luce, assistant secretary for planning, evaluation, and policy development at the U.S. Department of Education**, to **Valerie Woodruff, secretary of education for the State of Delaware**, all agreed that closing the achievement gap and successfully reforming schools will require the development and thoughtful use of well-designed longitudinal data systems in every state.

Over the course of a day and a half, experts set out a vision of how effective use of longitudinal data systems can help educators and policymakers assure that all students are taught the skills necessary to compete in today's workforce. **Roy Johnson from the Intercultural Development Research Association** explained how Texas built actionable knowledge for student success using longitudinal data on student attrition while **John Bridgeland, president and CEO of Civic Enterprises (and former director of the White House Domestic Policy Council)**, drew on his recently published report, *The Silent Epidemic*, to illustrate the relevance of using data to inform both policy and practice.

Representatives from the Data Quality Campaign described the practical benefits of longitudinal data for policymakers wanting to address issues of most concern to the public such as, "How many students drop out after eighth grade?" or "What percentage of each high school's graduates take remedial courses in college?"

There was a lively discussion on the importance of data as a tool for those focused on protecting the civil rights of America's students, and on the inherent tensions between the ideal and the practical in building and using these systems.

Participants were updated on recent national and federal activities related to the building and use of longitudinal data systems such as the graduation compact that has been signed by all 50 governors and the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) grants.

**John Jackson, chief policy officer for the National Association for Advancement of Colored People**, roused participants with an inspirational speech during Thursday's luncheon.

Throughout the 2-day symposium, panelists and audience members identified and debated issues surrounding implementation of data-driven decisionmaking to inform the art and science of policy and practice in an effort to close the student achievement gap. Researchers, advocates, policymakers, and practitioners all agreed that building and effectively using statewide data systems is a critical component for determining, influencing, and increasing student achievement, as well as improving educational attainment outcomes, including higher graduation rates.

Audio and video from the event is available on the Alliance website at <http://www.all4ed.org/events/DataSymposium.html>.



## **BREAKING RANKS IN THE MIDDLE: New Report Offers Guidance to Middle School Principals on Improving Student Achievement**

A new report released from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) challenges middle school principals to take responsibility for improving the academic outcomes of all of their students and for getting them on track for success in high school and beyond. The report, *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level School Reform*, details nine “cornerstone strategies” and 30 specific recommendations for improving student achievement. It also includes four full-length profiles and a number of vignettes of schools that already have many of the report’s recommendations in place.

“The early warning signals for high school dropouts and low-achieving students can be seen at the middle level,” said **Gerald N. Tirozzi, NASSP executive director**. “Collaborative leadership, data, personalized learning, and a rigorous curriculum at the middle level will better prepare students for high school and post-secondary success.”

The report’s nine strategies are concentrated in three key areas: 1) collaborative leadership, professional learning communities, and the strategic use of data; 2) personalizing the school environment; and 3) creating rigorous student-centered curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The report notes that improving results for high school students will meet with little success if the challenges and needs of students in middle school are not addressed. Its strategies and recommendations are closely tied to *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*.

More information on the report is available at [http://www.principals.org/s\\_nassp/sec.asp?CID=934&DID=53491](http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/sec.asp?CID=934&DID=53491).



## **STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Florida and Minnesota Governors Push High School Reform**

Saying that the state legislature needed to take education reforms to the next level, **Florida Governor Jeb Bush (R)** called for reforms that would give students a more rigorous and relevant high school education in his state of the state address on March 7. Unlike many other proposals that stress rigor and relevance in high school, Bush’s plan would begin in middle school.

“Too often in grades six through eight, there’s a break between the intensive skill building of the early grades, and the challenges of high school,” Bush said, “a break in which many students don’t build on the former, and aren’t prepared for the latter ... We must transform Florida high schools to prepare students to compete in a global market, and to build successful futures of their own design.”

Under Governor Bush’s proposal, which largely echoes the recommendations of the Florida State Board of Education’s High School Reform Task Force, students would be required to earn 12 credits in math, science, language arts, and social studies before they are promoted to high

school. His plan would provide summer academies to help struggling students who need extra help in the required subjects and intensive reading instruction for students who read below grade level. Students achieving at higher levels could take high school courses while they are still in middle school. To help make the high school grades relevant for students, Bush would also allow students to choose a major based on their career paths and interests.

Governor Bush also spoke a great deal about the progress the state has made in ensuring that every student can read at grade level. He proudly said that Florida enjoys the “the nation’s largest effort to drive reading instruction into classrooms.”

“I can’t tell you how many students in our schools were reading at grade level in 1997. Because no one had measured,” Bush said. “By 2001, we had tested every student in grades 3 through 10, so we knew that only 46% of them could read at grade level or above. Today, 53% of Florida students have this critical skill. We still have a long way to go, but we move forward every year.”

Governor Bush also talked the need for more rigor in high schools and stressed that too many high school students were graduating without the skills they need for college or work. In order to achieve a “stronger link between a student’s goal, and the preparation required to achieve it,” Bush would require an additional higher level of math credit and have students spend 15 of the 24 credits required for graduation on “rigorous core subjects.” He also promoted the state’s “Ready to Work” certification program, which helps vocational students earn the credentials they need to demonstrate they are ready for the workforce.

In his state of the state address on March 9, **Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty (R)** also offered proposals that would create more rigor in middle and high schools. Calling science and math the “currency of the new economy,” Pawlenty proposed that schools require students to take Algebra I by eighth grade and Algebra II and chemistry before they graduate from high school. Currently, Minnesota’s high school students must take three credits each in math and science, but Algebra II and chemistry are not mandatory.

“Education made Minnesota what it is today, and education will make us what we will become tomorrow,” he said. “We need to transform our high schools so we are better preparing our young people for the economy of the future. Academic progress in our secondary schools has flattened out.”

He also proposed two initiatives that would create up to five “pioneering high schools” and at least ten “pioneering districts.” Under his plan, pioneering high schools would overhaul the way they operate in order to focus on college preparedness or technical training. The pioneering districts would receive \$7 million in incentives to create Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs for all students in all grades.

**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.



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