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Public Education Policy And Progress



A PLAN FOR SUCCESS: Alliance Joins Nine Organizations Representing Communities of Color in Historic Effort to Focus on High School Equity

On June 19, nine of the nation's major organizations representing communities of color announced an unprecedented effort to ensure that America's secondary schools have the capacity and motivation to prepare every student for graduation, college, work, and life. The partnership, dubbed the Campaign for High School Equity, will shine a spotlight on the importance of graduating all students from high school with diplomas that prepare them for the future.

"The Campaign for High School Equity is an historic alliance of respected civil rights organizations standing together to call for the improvement of middle and high school education for the nation's communities of color," said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. "These students are particularly underserved. Their struggles with especially difficult and frequently ignored challenges too often result in dropping out of high school and into a life of little or no opportunity. The Campaign for High School Equity is a movement to change this outcome by helping these students with federal, state, and local policies that meet their needs—because all Americans must be educated to the highest level possible to ensure America's future." The Alliance is serving as the convener and coordinator for the Campaign.

Currently, however, large groups of minority students are not receiving the education that they deserve. According to *Diplomas Count 2007*, a recent report from the national publication *Education Week*, only 57.8 percent of Hispanic students, 53.4 percent of African American students, and 49.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students graduate from high school with a regular diploma, compared to 76.2 percent of white students. In addition—and contrary to the model minority myth—many Asian Americans also face barriers in education. For example, about 50 percent of Cambodians and Laotians and about 60 percent of Hmong aged twenty-five and older who are living in the United States have less than a high school education.

One of the Campaign for High School Equity's main priorities will be ensuring that federal and national education reform efforts include systemic change at the high school level. As noted in the Campaign's inaugural publication, *A Plan for Success: Communities of Color Define Policy Priorities for High School Reform*, the federal government, by passing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has become intimately involved in reform at the elementary level, but it has largely ignored America's secondary schools.

In *A Plan for Success*, the Campaign makes a compelling case for the need to invest in high schools and lays out a blueprint for meaningful reform that Congress should use when it reauthorizes NCLB later this year. Specifically, the Campaign calls on Congress to align high

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school standards, assessments, curriculum, and instruction with college- and work-readiness standards in an effort to make all students proficient and prepared for college and work. The report also includes recommendations on redesigning the American high school, improving teacher and principal effectiveness, and linking families and communities to students' academic and social outcomes.

The Campaign's member organizations will work together and individually to educate diverse communities about the need for serious reforms in high school education and to mobilize elected leaders, policymakers, parents, and students to push for changes that produce positive outcomes for students of color and low-income students.

The Campaign for High School Equity boasts a diverse membership, composed of organizations that are particularly known and respected for their leadership and historic roles in the civil rights movement. Its members include the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, the National Council of La Raza, the National Indian Education Association, the National Urban League, and the Southeast Asia Resource Center.

More information on the campaign and the report, *A Plan for Success: Communities of Color Define Policy Priorities for High School Reform*, is available at <http://www.highschoolequity.org/>.



LITERACY INSTRUCTION IN THE CONTENT AREAS: New Report Calls for Advanced Literacy Skills for All Students, Reading Instruction Across the Curriculum

Over the past few years, a strong coalition of educators, researchers, policymakers, professional associations, and advocacy groups has worked together to focus attention on the plight of millions of America's students in grades four through twelve who are unable to read and write well enough to achieve even basic academic success. Already, those efforts have paid off in a wide range of local, state, and federal initiatives designed to help struggling students develop the reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills they need to move beyond the basic mechanics of literacy and move ahead in the secondary school curriculum.

However, according to *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement*, a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education, aiming only to bring greater number of middle and high school students to a modest level of proficiency in reading and writing would be a "grave mistake." In addition, the report maintains, students will need to develop the advanced literacy skills that are required to master more complex academic content—especially in math, science, English, and history. Only then can students be truly prepared for college, work, and citizenship.

"The only way to guarantee that future generations will succeed in the twenty-first century is by raising expectations and meeting them with reading and writing strategies for each course," said

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia.

According to the report, written by **Cynthia R. Greenleaf, codirector of the Strategic Literacy Initiative at WestEd**, and **Rafael Heller, senior policy associate at the Alliance for Excellent Education**, more than two thirds of all eighth and twelfth graders read at less than a proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and half of those students are so far behind that they “drop off the scale entirely” and score below the most basic level.¹ It adds that poor literacy skills are also a problem for college-going students. In fact, only about half of high school juniors and seniors taking the ACT college entrance exam scored at a level indicating that they were college ready.

As a bit of good news, the report notes that several efforts are currently underway at the state and district levels to provide struggling adolescent readers with the high-quality interventions, materials, and instruction they need to bring their literacy skills up to grade level. At the federal level, legislation to authorize a federal Striving Readers program has been introduced in both chambers of Congress, with strong bipartisan support.

While these efforts will enable students to reach a modest level of proficiency in reading and writing, the report stresses that they do not address the achievement of the higher literacy levels students will need in order to succeed in college, a technical program, or another course of study. Or, as the report puts it, these strategies might help students “climb from the lower rungs of the ladder to the middle, but it will leave them a few rungs short of being able to continue their education.” It says that public schools must instead provide students with the advanced reading and writing skills that they will need in order to meet their own life goals, college-level standards, and workforce demands. According to the report, the next step for those working to improve adolescent literacy instruction must be to figure out how to improve reading in content areas while continuing to help students achieve basic reading skills.

In an effort to instruct district, state, and federal policymakers on how to make this leap, the report offers several recommendations. First, it suggests that policymakers define the roles and responsibilities of content area teachers clearly and consistently while assuring those teachers that they will not be held responsible for teaching basic reading skills to middle and high school students—that, the report says, is a job for reading specialists. However, it adds that members of every academic discipline should define the literacy skills that are essential to their content areas and identify those skills that they should be responsible for teaching.

The report also suggests that all secondary school teachers receive initial and ongoing professional development in teaching the reading and writing skills that are essential to their own content areas. It adds that states should require all secondary school teachers to take a course in literacy in the content areas, and that policymakers should continue to encourage districts and schools to refine and improve upon their use of literacy coaches to work with regular classroom teachers to assess and meet students’ literacy needs.

¹ Students who score below the basic level have some literacy skills in that they can decode and comprehend simple texts, but they tend to struggle with the more challenging materials typically assigned in middle and high schools and have trouble writing clear, effective materials on their own.

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Finally, policymakers should combine school and district rules and regulations, education funding mechanisms, and state standards and accountability systems to give content area teachers positive incentives and appropriate tools with which to provide reading and writing instruction. For example, the report says that states should include open-ended writing and analytic reading items in all high-stakes reading and writing assignments, content area tests, and graduation exams, rather than the multiple-choice and short-answer items that most currently use.

The report also connects the importance of teaching of reading and writing to the rest of the secondary school improvement agenda and says that policymakers should treat literacy instruction as a “key part of the broader effort to ensure that all students develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life after high school.”

“Literacy stands at the heart of the academic content areas, and inasmuch as these content areas comprise the heart of the secondary school curriculum, content area literacy instruction must be viewed as the cornerstone of any comprehensive movement to build the kinds of thriving, intellectually vibrant secondary schools that young people deserve and on which the nation’s social and economic health will depend,” the report concludes.

The complete report is available at
<http://www.all4ed.org/publications/LiteracyContent/index.html>.



SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVES EDUCATION FUNDING BILL: Dispute Over Earmarks Delays House Action

Earlier this month, the U.S. House Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education Appropriations Subcommittee allocated \$61.7 billion for the U.S. Department of Education in the fiscal year (FY) 2008 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. (Read <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/StraightAs/Volume7No12.html#House> for more information.) In the next step in the appropriations process, the full House Appropriations Committee was scheduled to consider the bill on June 14, but a disagreement over members’ special projects (often referred to as “pork” or “earmarks”) delayed its consideration.² The House Appropriations Committee is now expected to consider the bill sometime in July.

The Senate has moved forward toward finalizing an appropriations bill, however, and on June 19, the Senate Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee passed its version of the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. Two days later, on June 21, the full Senate Appropriations Committee gave its approval to the legislation. In the Senate version, the U.S. Department of Education would receive \$60.1 billion—an increase of approximately \$4.1 billion over the amount requested by President Bush in his FY 2008 budget, but about \$1.6 billion less than the amount included in the House subcommittee’s bill.

² Because of a lack of transparency around the earmark process in the past and questions about whether members of Congress receive a personal benefit from earmarks, new rules now require the sponsors of earmarks to be identified and to certify that they do not have a financial interest in them. (For more information on the earmark controversy, see <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/21/AR2007062101199.html>.)

The differences between the House and the Senate bills will eventually be addressed in a House-Senate conference that will occur after both chambers pass their own version of the bills. Because neither bill is expected to reach the floor of its respective chamber before July, the House-Senate conference will probably not occur until sometime in September at the earliest. After a compromise is reached, the bill will be sent to the president for his consideration. Already, however, President Bush has threatened to veto any appropriations bill that exceeds the amount in his FY 2008 budget.

Perhaps anticipating a showdown with President Bush over the increased spending in the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill, **Robert C. Byrd (D-WV), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee**, took an opportunity to contrast the funding increase in the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill with the amount spent on the war in Iraq. “While the President spends \$10 billion every month in Iraq, we have invested a fraction of that figure above his inadequate budget request in key domestic priorities here at home,” Byrd said. “For too long, our education system and health facilities have been burdened with the Bush Administration’s unfunded mandates and empty promises. . . . With this bill, we are placing real dollars in programs that are vital to strengthening the foundation of this country.”

Among specific programs, the Senate Appropriations Committee allocated \$13.9 billion for the Title I program—the same amount requested by President Bush, but approximately \$450 million below the amount in the House subcommittee’s bill. Special education programs would also receive a significant bump in the Senate subcommittee’s bill, going from \$10.8 billion in FY 2007 to \$12.3 billion in FY 2008. This amount represents \$1.8 billion more than the president’s budget request and \$1.3 billion more than the House subcommittee’s bill. Other programs that would receive increases under the bill approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee include the Striving Readers program, which would receive a \$4.1 million increase; Statewide Data Systems, which would receive a \$33.4 million boost; TRIO, which would receive a \$30 million increase; and GEAR UP, which would receive a \$10 million increase.

Like the House subcommittee, the Senate Appropriations Committee chose to send a message about the mismanagement of the Reading First program by cutting its funding by \$375 million, an amount lower than the House subcommittee’s \$629 million reduction. Over the past few months, investigations focused on the program’s implementation have revealed cases of mismanagement and have raised ethical questions.

The Smaller Learning Communities program also fared poorly, with the Senate Appropriations Committee choosing to eliminate all of the \$93.5 million that it received in FY 2007. The Senate also proposed to eliminate funding for the program last year, but the full amount was restored during negotiations with the House of Representatives. A similar scenario could develop this year as the House subcommittee allocates \$93.5 million for the program in its version of the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill for FY 2008.

A chart comparing the funding levels for selected education programs under President Bush’s budget request, the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the House Appropriations Subcommittee is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/legislative/FY08budget.html>.



READY FOR WHAT?: New Education Week Report Examines Graduation Rates, Relationship Between Education and Income

An estimated 1.23 million students, or about 30 percent of the Class of 2007, will not graduate with their classmates, according to a new report from *Education Week*. The report, *Diplomas Count: Ready for What? Preparing for College, Careers, and Life After High School*, also finds that those students who do graduate from high school will need at least some college in order to have access to decent-paying jobs.

“At both national and state levels, our research shows that a high school diploma alone is not sufficient for students to access the jobs that will provide a real future and to thrive in our economy,” said **Editorial Projects in Education Research Center Director Christopher B. Swanson**, who conducted the analysis.

Using information from a U.S. Department of Labor database that classifies jobs into five “zones” by education, training, and experience requirements, combined with data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the analysis shows the proportion of adults nationally and in each state who hold occupations in various job zones, their median earnings, and their average education levels.

For example, in job zone 3, which includes dental hygienists, electricians, and preschool teachers, among others, the median income is \$35,672 annually. In that job zone, 37 percent of workers have some college education and another 26 percent have a bachelor’s degree. Conversely, in job zone 1, where 69 percent of individuals have a high school diploma or less, the average income is \$12,638. Not only will individuals with some college earn more money, but they will also enjoy more job security. The report finds that the average adult with some postsecondary education has a 68 percent chance of being steadily employed versus only 58 percent for a high school dropout.

The report also examines graduation rates both nationally and at the state level. For the nation, only 69.9 percent of high school students receive their high school diploma on time. For minority students, that number is even lower, with only 57.8 percent of Hispanics, 53.4 percent of African Americans, and 49.3 percent of American Indians graduating on time, compared to 76.2 percent for white students and 80.2 percent for Asian Americans.

At the state level, Utah, at 83.8 percent, and New Jersey, at 82.5 percent, had the highest graduation rates in the nation. On the other end of the spectrum, South Carolina, at 53.8 percent, and Nevada, at 54 percent, had the lowest graduation rates.

The report also pinpoints exactly when students drop out of the pipeline, finding that 35 percent of students fail to make the transition from ninth grade to tenth grade. Additionally, 27 percent are lost in tenth grade, 19 percent in eleventh grade, and 19 percent in twelfth grade. In some states (Delaware, Florida, and Texas), over half of the students who drop out do so between the ninth and tenth grades.

In conjunction with the report, *Education Week* also launched a new mapping tool that allows individuals to find graduation rates for every school district in the country. In addition, users can

download a special report for a particular school district that includes detailed information on where students are lost from the high school pipeline.

The complete report and a link to the online mapping tool are available at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2007/06/12/index.html>.



THE HIGH COST OF TEACHER TURNOVER: New Analysis Pags National Cost of Teacher Turnover at \$7.3 Billion

Teacher turnover costs the nation over \$7.3 billion annually, draining resources, diminishing teacher quality, and undermining the nation's ability to close the student achievement gap. So says a new analysis by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF). The analysis is based on an eighteen-month pilot study that NCTAF completed in five school districts: Chicago, Granville, NC, Jemez Valley, NM, Milwaukee, and Santa Rosa, NM

“This is a good news/bad news story,” said **NCTAF President Tom Carroll**. “We want to help school leaders identify the problem so that they will be in a better position to manage their resources to reduce teacher turnover and improve teacher quality.”

According to a policy brief released in conjunction with the analysis, the teacher turnover rate has risen to 16.8 percent nationwide and is over 20 percent in urban areas. In some areas, the brief notes, the teacher dropout rate is actually higher than the student dropout rate. It also finds that the teacher turnover problem is most severe in the nation's high-minority, high-poverty, and low-performing schools.

To help stem the tide of teachers leaving the profession, NCTAF suggests that schools and districts invest in comprehensive induction programs for new teachers. It notes that 46 percent of all new teachers leave the profession within five years, and that the cost of such a program could be offset by the savings achieved through decreasing teacher turnover.

NCTAF also suggests that comprehensive retention strategies be targeted to at-risk schools and that districts upgrade data systems in order to analyze teacher turnover and its costs. Finally, it suggests that NCLB be amended so that each local and state education agency would be required to publicly report the distribution of qualified teachers, the average years of teaching experience in each school, the annual rate of teacher and principal attrition, and the cost of that attrition for each school in the district.

Additional information on the pilot study and the policy brief is available at http://www.nctaf.org/resources/demonstration_projects/turnover/TeacherTurnoverCostStudy.htm

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC, 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 six million at-risk middle and high 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 7 No. 13: June 25, 2007

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First Class Mail
U.S Postage
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Woodbridge, VA

Volume 7 No. 13: June 25, 2007

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