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Public Education Policy And Progress



FROM NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND TO EVERY CHILD A GRADUATE: Members of Congress and Staff Vow that High Schools Will Be Included in NCLB Reauthorization at High School Policy Conference

U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) and **U.S. Congressman Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX)**, along with Democratic and Republican staff from the Senate and House education committees, were emphatic that the needs of the nation's secondary schools and their students would be addressed in the revision of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that is currently being negotiated by Congress. They were among the speakers at the October 4–5 national high school policy conference hosted by the Alliance for Excellent Education, which brought together local, state, and national education leaders to discuss federal strategies for improving the achievement and attainment levels of the nation's struggling middle and high school students.

Welcoming conference attendees, **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, noted that the conference occurred on the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite, and only a few days after the fiftieth anniversary of the forced integration of Central High School in Little Rock, AR, when President Dwight Eisenhower ordered federal troops to escort nine African American students into the school building.

Wise described both events as watershed moments for the nation's education system. Sputnik provided tangible evidence that the United States was no longer the world leader in space exploration and galvanized the public and the government to usher in new reforms in education, particularly in the fields of science and math. And Wise called the integration of Central High by the "Little Rock Nine" one of the first times that the federal government stated affirmatively that every child should get a quality education.

While recognizing that country has made a lot of gains since 1957, Wise said it has much more work to do. "Since Sputnik, we have gone to the moon, but we have not significantly improved graduation rates," he said. "And, fifty years after the Little Rock Nine, we continue to provide students of color a poor education. Graduation rates for students of color hover at just over 50 percent, and only about 20 percent graduate prepared to succeed in college. Fifty years ago, it was a beeping overhead [telemetry from Sputnik 1 as it passed over Earth]. Today's challenge isn't as evident—it's what I call the 'Silent Sputnik,' but the challenge is no less daunting."

Appearing directly after Wise, **Bethany Little, vice president for policy and federal advocacy at the Alliance for Excellent Education**, took the podium to lay out the concerns of many educators and advocates regarding the current limitations of NCLB related to secondary schools. She noted that the law provides few of the supports that are critical to significantly improving

From No Child Left Behind to Every Child a Graduate (Continued from p. 1)

low-performing secondary schools and that it provides little help for students in danger of dropping out. Picking up where Little left off, a panel of Congressional staff from the majority and minority staffs of the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee—the two committees responsible for reauthorizing NCLB—discussed how the reauthorization could improve the nation’s secondary schools.

As a whole, the panel was highly complimentary of the role that the Alliance for Excellent Education played in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA), also known as NCLB. “The work that Governor Wise and the federal and legislative team have done has been incredible,” said **Roberto Rodriguez from the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee**. “If it weren’t for the Alliance’s work, this work of secondary reform in ESEA would not be on the radar screen.”

Acknowledging that high schools were largely left out of NCLB when it was enacted in 2002, **Lindsay Hunsicker, also from the Senate HELP Committee**, emphasized that emerging research now provides the data necessary to make high school reform a significant part of NCLB reauthorization. Echoing her comments, **Michael Yudin, from Senator Jeff Bingaman’s (D-NM) staff**, added that, unlike five years ago, Congressional staff and members of Congress now know where dropouts go to school, which students are at risk of dropping out when they enter ninth grade, and which interventions work to improve student performance.

With this data, panelists said they were able to include several high school initiatives in the draft plan to reauthorize NCLB. Specifically, **Jill Morningstar of the House Education and Labor Committee** mentioned a Graduation Promise Fund to turn around high schools with low graduation rates, a Striving Readers program to help older students who struggle to read and write at grade level, and a greater emphasis on graduation rate accountability. In addition, **Kirsten Duncan of the House Education and Labor Committee** discussed the work that had been done on defining an accurate graduation rate, dropout prevention, and other reauthorizations that were pending, including the Higher Education Act and the Workforce Investment Act.

During the next panel, **Mike Petrilli of the Fordham Foundation**, who served as the moderator, asked whether the federal government should mandate a common national test as a way to raise state standards. During the debate, **Gene Wilhoit of the Council of Chief State School Officers** said that he preferred that states work together to develop a common test and indicated that several states had already agreed to use a common math test. Speaking for the Council of Great City Schools, **Jason Snipes** said that school superintendents were concerned about national standards, but were more worried about the achievement gap that currently exists between their students.

Even if states were to raise their standards, NCLB as currently written does a poor job measuring high school performance and identifying and prioritizing low-performing schools. That was the point made by **Scott Palmer of Holland & Knight** on a panel on high school accountability.

During discussion, **Kirsten Vital of the Oakland Unified School District** talked about a unique accountability system that is currently in place in Oakland, CA.

The question of how to turn around low-performing high schools once they were identified provoked a lively discussion on another panel, with **JoEllen Lynch of the New York City Department of Education** and **Michael Durr, principal of John Hope High School, Chicago**, sharing strategies that were successful in their work.

The first panel on day two of the conference discussed the very important role that teachers play in helping to turn around the lowest-performing schools and students and how the federal government can evaluate teachers and teacher effectiveness. **Rene Islas of the Baker Daniels consulting firm** said much progress has been made in measuring teacher effectiveness and isolating the impact that a teacher can have on student learning.

Audio and video of the entire conference, a complete list of speakers, and PowerPoint presentations are available at http://www.all4ed.org/events/fourth_HSpolicyconference.

Double the Numbers: Jobs for the Future Conference Highlights Need to Boost High School Graduation Rates and College Completion Rates Among Low-Income Students

October 4 and 5 proved to be quite a busy day for education advocates in Washington, DC, as Jobs for the Future (JFF) was also in town holding its annual Double the Numbers conference. This year's gathering built on a 2003 JFF conference that set a goal of "doubling the numbers" of low-income students who become college graduates and focused on four strategies for improving high school graduation rates and promoting postsecondary attainment.

At the conference, JFF also released *Minding the Gap: Why Integrating High School with College Makes Sense and How to Do It*, a new book that argues that all students need a postsecondary education in today's global economy. It explores strategies that would enable a larger number of low-income and first-generation college students to earn postsecondary degrees. More information about the conference and the book is available at <http://www.jff.org>.



EDUCATION AT A GLANCE: International Report Finds U.S. Educational Progress Lacking Compared to International Counterparts

Forty years ago, the United States led the world in secondary and higher education rankings, by essentially every measure. Today, however, many other countries have caught up with and even surpassed the United States in nearly every relevant indicator. So says *Education at a Glance*, an annual report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that provides internationally comparable data and analysis on the state of education in OECD's thirty member countries.¹

According to the report, American fifty-five- to sixty-four-year-olds—those who typically would have graduated in the 1960s—lead the world in percentage of high school graduates for their age group, whereas current twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds rank a distant tenth. And the nation's 2005 graduation rate is even worse; it ranks a dismal eighteenth of twenty-three OECD countries.

¹ The OECD member countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States.

Education at a Glance (Continued from p. 3)

Similar trends are evident in higher education. Although the United States continues to be a leader in attaining university degrees, the rate of attainment has grown by only 2 percent over three generations, which is less than one fifth the rate of growth in the average OECD country. As a result, several countries now match the United States in this area, and the data indicates that other OECD countries' younger generations' rates of attainment are poised to pass the U.S. rate.

Although per student spending in elementary and secondary schools in the United States is higher than in any other country, the report notes that a comparatively small proportion of the resources is invested in teachers. The average teacher's pay, relative to the gross domestic product, is one of the lowest among OECD countries. Moreover, teachers in both primary and secondary education are asked to do more than those in other countries; American educators have the highest number of teaching hours, far above the OECD average.

The high expenditures in U.S. elementary and secondary schools also extend to children at the pre-K level, where the United States outspends all but the United Kingdom in per pupil estimates. Yet enrollment rates in pre-K programs are significantly lower in America than the OECD average. Several countries are approaching 100 percent enrollment of three- to four-year-olds while the United States' enrollment rate stands at only 50 percent.

More information on *Education at a Glance* is available at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2007>.

OECD Data Comes to Life: Video Available of OECD Presentation at Alliance Conference

At the Alliance's conference last week, **Andreas Schleicher, head of the Indicators and Analysis Division for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**, described the gaps between high school performance and college trends in the United States and other countries. His comprehensive presentation used detailed graphs and data from the OECD's *Education at a Glance*.

Schleicher explained that while the United States still possesses the world's most educated workforce, much of America's competitive edge was due to history and to the actions that the United States took after World War II; the GI Bill, for example, provided for college or vocational education for returning World War II veterans. Since then, the nation's competitive advantage has narrowed considerably as other countries have caught up and surpassed the United States. During the 1960s, for instance, the United States was first in the percentage of its population with a high school diploma, whereas Korea was twenty-seventh. Today, Korea is first and the United States is eighteenth.

Audio and video of Schleicher's presentation and his highly recommended PowerPoint presentation are available at http://www.all4ed.org/events/fourth_HSpolicyconference.



COURSE GRADES AND ATTENDANCE RATES PRIME PREDICTORS: New Report Examines What Matters for Staying On Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools

Freshman course grades and attendance rates are far more important for predicting whether students will graduate from high school than test scores or family background, according to *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools*, a recent report from the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago.

“Even though we often think of dropping out as influenced by many different factors, it is a predictable event,” said **Elaine Allensworth, a co-director at the Consortium and the lead**

author of the study. “We can tell with surprising accuracy who is eventually going to graduate, who is going to drop out, and who could go either way by looking at students’ grades in the freshman year.”

In an analysis of first-time freshmen in the 2004–05 school year, the report finds that the freshman year is a make-it-or-break-it year for all students—both high and low performers. According to the report, strong students can quickly fall off course if they start cutting ninth grade classes and not completing assignments; at the same time, students who struggled in elementary school can turn things around if they come to school every day and aim for at least a B average. Unfortunately, half of Chicago freshmen fail at least one course, about 40 percent miss more than a month of school in that first year (which includes class cutting), and the average GPA is lower than a C.

The study builds on previous CCSR work that developed an on-track indicator that could predict the likelihood that a student would graduate from high school. In that work, CCSR determined that students are on track to graduate if they had completed enough credits by the end of ninth grade to be promoted to tenth grade and had failed no more than one semester of a core subject.

One problem with the on-track indicator is that it cannot predict whether students are on track to graduate until after their freshman year. In an effort to give schools earlier data on students’ progress toward graduation and encourage them to be more vigilant with vulnerable students, CCSR’s newest report looks closely at a range of readily available indicators of high school performance and their relationship with eventual graduation. The report finds that a typical freshman who earns a B average or better has a 95 percent chance of graduating in four years and an 80 percent chance of graduating with a 3.0 GPA or higher. On the other hand, freshmen with less than a C- average are much more likely to drop out than receive their diploma.

The report also finds that attendance is a stronger predictor of a student’s grades than previously realized. For example, freshmen who miss two weeks or more of school per semester fail at least two classes on average—even if they arrive at high school with top test scores. Just one week of absence more than makes up for the difference in failure rates between top and bottom scoring students. Attendance also plays a huge part in whether a student ultimately graduates. According to the report, 90 percent of freshmen who miss less than one week of school per semester receive their diploma.

In addition to course grades and attendance, school factors also play an important role in shaping freshmen academic outcomes. The report finds that attendance, pass rates, and grades are higher than expected in schools where more students feel their classroom teachers can be trusted to keep their word, give them individual attention, and show personal concern for their academic success. In addition, schools that make classroom work relevant to a student’s life after high school and have high expectations for all students have lower than expected absence rates and higher than expected grades.

In light of these findings, the report suggests that intervention efforts focused on students who are just below average—those with GPAs in the C- to D+ range and who miss one or two weeks per semester—could pay off in higher graduation rates for schools. According to the report, these

Course Grades and Attendance Rates Prime Predictors (Continued from p. 5)

students' chances of earning their diplomas are about 50-50, but they are often not seen as at risk of dropping out or in need of additional supports.

The complete report is available at http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=116.

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: Alliance Event Features Findings from CCSR, Johns Hopkins and Boston Public Schools

In a recent Alliance for Excellent Education symposium, Elaine Allensworth, a co-director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago, discussed the findings from *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools* and offered suggestions for how schools and families can keep more teens in school. The event, "Turning Around Low-Performing High Schools: Lessons for Federal Policy from Research and Practice," also featured presenters from the Boston Public Schools and Johns Hopkins University.

In his presentation, **Larry M. Myatt from the Office of High School Renewal in the Boston Public Schools** discussed the Boston Public Schools' use of data to drive policy and practice throughout the district, particularly as it informs the design and implementation of high school improvement efforts. In addition, **Robert Balfanz, a research scientist at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University**, presented new data on the nearly 2,000 "dropout factories" located across the nation that produce half of the nation's dropouts. In these schools, the number of seniors is routinely 60 percent or fewer than the number of freshmen four years earlier. Balfanz also discussed the characteristics of these schools and their students, and what is best known about how to address their problems.

Video from the symposium is available at http://www.all4ed.org/events/turn_around.

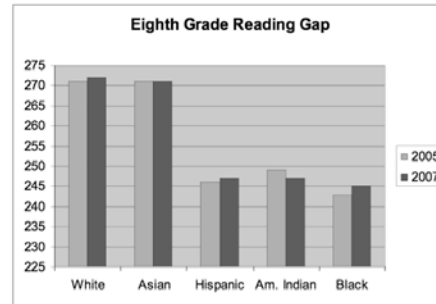
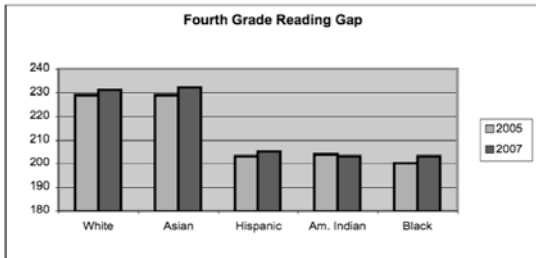


NATION'S REPORT CARD SHOWS GAINS IN MATH AND READING: Fourth Graders Post Highest Scores Ever in Math and Reading Tests, Middle School Students Stagnant in Reading

In 2007, America's fourth-grade students posted the highest average reading scores in the history of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the "Nation's Report Card," according to results released on September 25. The same was true in math, as both fourth- and eighth-graders had average mathematics scores that were higher in 2007 than in any other assessment year. However, eighth graders' reading scores, while one point higher than in 2005, were still one point lower than the average score in 2003. In addition, nearly 70 percent of all eighth-grade students failed to score as being able to read proficiently or better.

Appearing at an elementary school in New York City, President Bush seized on the report card's results to tout the No Child Left Behind Act. "The No Child Left Behind Act is working. I say that because the Nation's Report Card says it's working," Bush said. "Scores are improving, in some instances hitting all-time highs. Children across America are learning. The achievement gap that has long punished underprivileged students is beginning to close."

Although the achievement gap in reading is indeed beginning to narrow slightly between white students and their black classmates, there is still a long way to go, as evidenced in the charts on page seven.



In fourth-grade reading, white students outpaced their black classmates by 28 percentage points in 2007, a decrease of only 1 percentage point. At the eighth-grade level, the achievement gap also narrowed by 1 percentage point, but white students continued to score 27 percentage points higher in reading than black students in 2007. Meanwhile, the achievement gap between white students and Hispanic students in fourth and eighth grade did not move.

The report card finds a similar achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent classmates. At the fourth-grade level, students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch scored 27 percentage points below their classmates who did not qualify for the program, no change from 2005. In eighth grade, however, the gap between students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and those who were not actually increased, from 23 percentage points in 2005 to 24 percentage points in 2007.

In math, the results were better, as an upward trend in the average score continued at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels. In fourth grade, the average score was two percentage points higher than in 2005 and fourteen percentage points higher than in 2000. In eighth-grade, the average score was two points higher than 2005 and eight points higher than in 2000.

Complete results from the math and reading tests are available at <http://nationsreportcard.gov/>.

Give Kids Good Schools/Lights On Afterschool

The week of October 15–21 is Give Kids Good Schools Week, part of a national public education campaign launched in 2006 by the Public Education Network (PEN) that seeks to provide Americans with the information and resources they need to take action in their communities to improve their public schools. During the week, PEN's local education fund members and Give Kids Good Schools partners will host events and activities.

In the middle of the week, on October 18, the Afterschool Alliance will hold Lights On Afterschool, which calls attention to the importance of afterschool programs for America's children, families, and communities. The Afterschool Alliance launched the campaign in October 2000, and it has grown quickly—this year one million Americans are expected to participate. Nationwide, one in four youth, or 14.3 million children, are alone and unsupervised after school. Afterschool programs keep these kids safe, help working families, and inspire learning. They also provide opportunities to help young people develop into successful adults.

More information on Give Kids Good Schools Week is available at <http://givekidsgoodschools.org>. More information on Lights On Afterschool is available at http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/lights_on/index.cfm.

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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