



StraightA's™

Public Education Policy And Progress

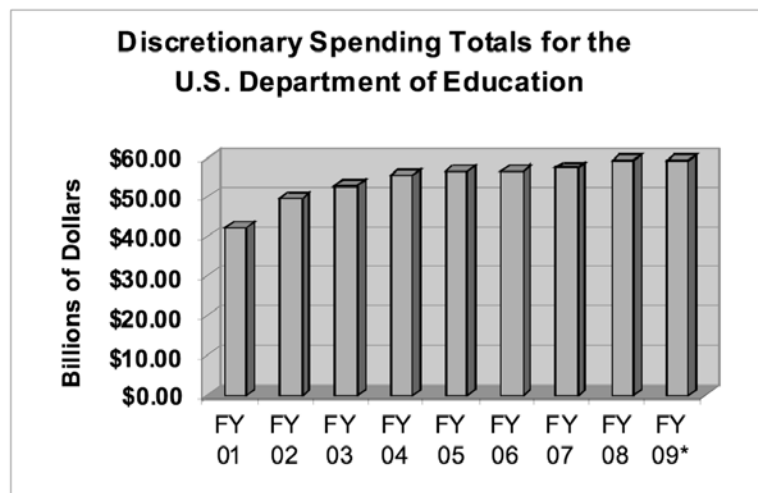


BUSH BUDGET PROPOSES SPENDING FREEZE FOR U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: Title I, Striving Readers, Statewide Data Systems Among Few Programs Slated for Increase

On February 4, President Bush unveiled a Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 budget that proposes an overall freeze on funding for the U.S. Department of Education. It would eliminate funding for forty-seven education programs and spend \$300 million for a “Pell Grants for Kids” program that has been characterized by some on Capitol Hill as a voucher program that would take money away from already-hurting public schools.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings prefaced her annual briefing on the education budget by saying that she wanted to put the education budget in context. She said that the president had several objectives when he crafted his budget: addressing the country’s immediate economic challenges, ensuring sustained prosperity, keeping America safe, ensuring that the budget is balanced by 2012, and addressing the long-term spending challenges that the nation is facing.

Noting that discretionary spending for the U.S. Department of Education has increased by 40 percent since 2001, Spellings also pointed out increases in the president’s FY 2009 budget for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Reading First, Title I, and special education. She expressed hope that the president’s budget would encourage Congress to reauthorize NCLB and specifically mentioned school improvement and accountability as two issues that were “most pressing.”



**FY 09 represents the amount proposed in the president’s budget.*

In a statement issued that morning, Spellings said that the budget process is “one where we must balance process and priorities and I believe this budget does that for education.” She added that the president’s budget “provides the necessary resources for critical programs that equip American students with the skills they need to compete and succeed in the knowledge-based economy.”

Bush Budget Proposes Spending Freeze for the U.S. Department of Education

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Democrats on Capitol Hill disagreed with Secretary Spellings's assertion that the budget would provide the necessary resources. **Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee** expressed concern that the president was proposing only to reshuffle existing funding for the nation's public elementary and secondary schools in a year that Congress hopes to reauthorize NCLB.

"As we work to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year, I am particularly concerned that the president has once again proposed inadequate funding for the law's important reforms," he said. "He has used the same old tactics of robbing other education priorities to pay for his modest increases for school reform. His budget once again siphons scarce resources from our public schools to create a new voucher program, and he eliminates the existing afterschool program in favor of an \$800 million voucher-based alternative. Our schools and children deserve more than accounting gimmicks—they need new resources to make progress on reform."

Last year, Democrats also opposed the proposed Bush budget, which planned to hold overall discretionary spending to about a 1 percent increase and cut the funding of several departments, including the U.S. Department of Education. Despite their efforts to increase funding for education and other domestic programs, however, Democrats ultimately were forced to pare their alternative proposals to reduce overall spending to a level that the president would accept. Democrats were able to move money around to fund key priorities, such as a \$2 billion increase for the U.S. Department of Education, but ended up with an overall total that was in line with the president's target.

In a statement on the Senate floor on February 4, **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)** noted the special circumstances that surrounded last year's budget process and pledged that this year would be different.

"The president had us over a barrel last year on the appropriations bills because we did not want another continuing resolution," Reid said.¹ "But he does not have us over a barrel this year because either Senator Clinton or Senator Obama will be the president in less than a year. If we have to deal with a CR next year, we will deal with it. We will finish that by the end of January. ... I look forward to working with our colleagues and hope we can do a better job with our appropriations bills than last year. But I repeat, we are not going to be held hostage by the unreasonableness of the White House. I hope we can work together and get some bills passed."

The president's education budget did include some additional funding for a few programs, requesting a total of \$100 million for the Striving Readers program, a \$64.6 million increase over last year, and \$100 million for the Statewide Data Systems program, a \$51.7 million increase. According to a summary document from the U.S. Department of Education, only twenty-seven states have received funding under the data systems program, and the proposed increase would

¹ A continuing resolution (CR) is a temporary funding measure that allows Congress to extend the time to pass spending bills and send them to the president for his signature.

support new awards to states yet to receive funding, as well as additional awards to currently funded states for an expansion of their K–12 systems to include postsecondary and workforce information. Including this new information would allow states to determine the extent to which students are leaving high school ready for college and employment.

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, said that he was “encouraged” by the president’s proposal to reform the nation’s high schools, especially by its inclusion of “stronger graduation rate accountability and increases for adolescent literacy and statewide data systems.” However, Wise cautioned that freezing funding for the U.S. Department of Education “will not adequately fund the nation’s education challenges nor offer Congress incentive to improve the No Child Left Behind Act.”

A table that compares the president’s proposed funding levels for certain programs that benefit middle and high schools to the totals from last year is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Fiscal09ProgramChart.pdf>.



“THE COST OF WAITING”: Key Congressional Staff Say that Reauthorizing NCLB is a Priority in 2008

In his State of the Union address on January 28, President Bush called on Congress to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which he referred to as a “good law” that is succeeding. Bush briefly touched on some specific changes that he wanted made to the law, including increased accountability, added flexibility for states and districts, extra help for struggling schools, and reforms to reduce the number of high school dropouts.

“The No Child Left Behind Act is a bipartisan achievement,” he said. “It is succeeding. And we owe it to America’s children, their parents, and their teachers to strengthen this good law.”

Two days after the State of the Union address, the Commission on No Child Left Behind and other education policy organizations (including the Alliance for Excellent Education) hosted an event on Capitol Hill, “Improving No Child Left Behind Now: The Cost of Waiting,” that featured Congressional and administration leaders on NCLB reauthorization, as well as school and community representatives from across the nation.

In his opening remarks, **Roy Barnes, former governor of Georgia and co-chair of the Commission on No Child Left Behind**, urged Congress to reauthorize NCLB. “Make sure that we implement and renew this law,” he said. “This is something that needs to be done this year. Just because we have a presidential election does not mean that we stop the world as it turns.”

Key Congressional staff from the House and Senate education committees and a representative from the U.S. Department of Education seconded Barnes’s comments and, without exception, said that reauthorizing NCLB was a priority for this year. They also agreed that a lot had been learned in the five years since NCLB was first signed into law and that while the core principles of the law are still good, some changes need to be made.

“The Cost of Waiting”

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Carmel Martin, a member of the majority staff of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, spoke about Senator Edward Kennedy’s key reauthorization priorities. Specifically, she listed improving instructional teams (teachers, school leaders, etc.) in schools, making a stronger connection between parents and schools, providing greater support to help schools improve, and addressing the dropout crisis. “[The senator] talks most often about tackling the dropout crisis—something that the current law doesn’t address in an effective way,” she said. “That’s something that he feels very strongly that we need to tackle.”

Martin also discussed how Senator Kennedy would like to improve the NCLB accountability system, mentioning the need for incentives to encourage states to raise their standards, a more sophisticated way to measure progress such as growth models, and a move away from a “one-size-fits-all” accountability system.

Lindsay Hunsicker, a minority staffer on the Senate HELP Committee, echoed Martin’s comments about the accountability system and suggested the need for a “more nuanced approach” that takes into account lessons learned over the past few years. She also talked about the need to “pull up” low-income students and give them a sound education and math and reading skills that would help them compete in the global economy.

Alice Johnson Cain, majority staff for the House Education and Labor Committee, stressed that funding for the law would be a big issue for her boss, **Representative George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee**. She said that he was looking for a significant increase in funding for NCLB programs and that the president’s budget will set the tone for the reauthorization. “We want the reform, but we want the resources,” she said.

James Bergeron, a minority staff member of the House Education and Labor Committee, said that **the committee’s top Republican, Representative Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-CA)**, was focused on maintaining the law’s strong accountability system but also wanted to strengthen parental options and expand state and local flexibility. He also mentioned bolstering teacher quality, pay-for-performance for teachers, growth models, differentiated consequences for schools that just missed making Adequate Yearly Progress (versus consistently failing schools), and other changes McKeon would like to see made.

Doug Mesecar of the U.S. Department of Education spoke about the Bush administration’s priorities for reauthorizing the law. He focused on the need to improve the high school graduation rate, especially for low-income and minority students, whose graduation rate hovers around 50 percent. He said that such a low graduation rate for those students was a threat, not only to the students and their families, but also to the nation as a whole. He also discussed the changes that U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings could make if Congress is unable to reauthorize the law this year. Specifically he mentioned the need for more reliable graduation rate calculations, better implementation and delivery of supplemental services and public school choice, and a more nuanced accountability system.

Another panel focused on the ways that states, local school boards, and local districts are implementing and reacting to the law and why Congress needs to reauthorize the law this year. Speakers included **Deborah Jewell-Sherman, superintendent of the Richmond (VA) Public Schools; Gary Mabrey III, president and CEO of the Johnson City (TN) Chamber of Commerce; Natalie Elder, principal of Hardy Elementary School in Chattanooga, TN; Martha Reichrath, deputy superintendent of the Georgia Department of Education; and Eduardo Angulo, chairman of the Salem/Keizer (OR) Coalition for Equality.**

Video from the event is available at http://www.all4ed.org/events/improving_NCLB.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Governors Focus on Reducing Dropout Rates, Increasing College Access

In their state of the state addresses, governors from around the country continued to stress the importance of providing students with a strong education. They examined ways to strengthen their states' education systems from kindergarten through college, focusing specifically on improving teacher quality, reducing dropout rates, and increasing access to college.

Michigan: Granholm Sets Goal of Doubling the State's College Graduates

In her state of the state address on January 29, **Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm (D)** proposed legislation to address the continuum of needs in the pre-K–20 system in order to reach the state's goal of doubling the number of college graduates in Michigan. She remarked, "To reach that goal, we'll make progress throughout our education system, from preschool to grad school to on-the-job training."

Granholm announced that her budget would significantly expand early childhood education and called on all school districts to begin offering full-day kindergarten. "This simple step will make a dramatic difference in the lives of our children," she stated. "We want all our students to have a great start in school, because we want them to have great opportunities in life."

Turning her attention to the end of the K–12 pipeline, Granholm said that Michigan's high school dropout rates were unacceptable and urged the state legislature to raise the dropout age to eighteen. She also proposed creating a Twenty-first Century Schools Fund that would replace large failing high schools with smaller early college high schools that would provide students with the skills they need to succeed in college and the work place..

"Free from red tape and bureaucracy, these schools will deploy the new three Rs—rigor, relevance, and relationships—to keep students in high school and then get them to college or technical training," said Granholm.

Continuing her focus on postsecondary education, Granholm remarked upon the successes of the Kalamazoo Promise, a program that provides each Kalamazoo Public Schools graduate with the opportunity to attend postsecondary education with up to a 100 percent tuition scholarship. She also committed to signing legislation that would expand the program to communities across the state. Finally, Granholm proposed rewarding colleges and universities when their graduates start

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businesses that provide opportunities for low-income students. “We will invest more in higher education,” she stated, “and we will expect more in return.”

Governor Granholm’s complete speech is available at http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-23442_21981-184537--,00.html.

Wisconsin: Doyle Focuses on Teacher Pay

Saying that Wisconsin’s teacher compensation system is “broken” and “a relic from a political fight a half a generation ago,” **Wisconsin Governor James Doyle Jr. (D)**, in his state of the state address on January 23, announced a new plan to increase teacher pay. He said that his budget would invest in a compensation system that rewards teachers who take on the hardest assignments, advance their skills, and help their students succeed. He expressed particular concern over the fact that one third of the state’s teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching.

“Everyday we depend on our teachers to enrich young minds and build a brighter future for Wisconsin,” he said. “But today, teachers in Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, [and] Iowa all make more than Wisconsin teachers. In fact starting teachers in forty-eight other states make more than Wisconsin teachers. We need high standards for our students and our teachers, but we have a compensation system that rewards neither.”

Other education proposals included a plan to require high school students to take a third year of math and a third year of science before they could graduate. Such a plan, he said, would help to ensure that students are college- and work-ready.

Governor Doyle’s complete speech is available at http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/journal_media_detail.asp?locid=19&prid=3122.

Oklahoma: Henry Proposes Graduation Coaches to Decrease Dropout Rates

In his state of the state address on February 4, **Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry (D)** proposed a new program that would put “graduation coaches” into Oklahoma schools. The program, modeled after a similar system in Georgia, would link mentors with at-risk students to keep them focused on academics and help them deal with issues outside of school that could be a barrier to graduation.

“In the last several years, we have done a better job providing new resources to education, while at the same time increasing academic rigor and accountability,” Henry said in a statement prior to his state of the state address, “but those efforts are of little use to students who don’t stay in school. More than ever before, a high school diploma is needed for success in the workplace, yet too many of our young people are entering the world without the education so vital to their success. With this program in a place, a graduation coach will be there to help students through difficult times and see them on to graduation.”

Like his counterpart in Wisconsin, Henry also expressed concern over losing teachers to neighboring states and reminded lawmakers of the state's five-year plan to raise teacher pay to match the regional average. "Few professions are more critical in shaping future generations, and we are fortunate to have many of the finest educators in the nation," he said. "It's no wonder, then, that Texas and other states have long recruited many of our best educators." Noting that the state is in the final year of its five-year plan, Henry encouraged state lawmakers to keep the promise to teachers and provide the final \$1,200 boost that would bring Oklahoma teacher salaries in line with the regional average.

Governor Henry's complete speech is available at <http://www.governor.state.ok.us/stateofthestate2008.php>.

Utah: Huntsman Proposes Year-Round Contracts for Math and Science Teachers

Utah Governor Jon M. Huntsman Jr. (R) also focused on the importance of teachers in his state of the state speech on January 23. He noted that his state had four hundred teacher vacancies, double the previous year's shortfall.

"This trend is increasingly corrosive," he said. "It is time we put educators back on a pedestal. To do this we must improve two things: compensation and capacity."

Huntsman proposed increasing the number of graduating teachers from 2,300 to 3,300 by 2011. In addition, he proposed year-round contracts for math and science teachers, which would provide opportunities for students to remediate or accelerate in their studies during the summer months.

"It is amazing to me that, in this age of innovation and education, we have students, buildings and teachers sitting idle for three months every year," he said. "Based on any business model, this would be unacceptable. ... The global economy doesn't take summers off, neither should we."

In an effort to give principals what he called "greater accountability and responsibility" to manage their schools, Huntsman proposed giving principals the ability to reward good teachers and to fire bad ones.

Governor Huntsman's speech is available at http://www.utah.gov/governor/news/2008/news_01_22_08.html.

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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