



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



EXITING AS HE ENTERED: President Bush Uses Last Policy Speech as President to Observe NCLB's Seventh Anniversary and Encourage Congress to Reauthorize the Law

On January 23, 2001, three days after his inauguration, George W. Bush delivered his [first policy speech](#) as president of the United States and outlined the ideas and principals behind what would become the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

“We’ve got one thing in mind,” Bush said, “an education system that’s responsive to the children, an education system that educates every child, an education system that I’m confident can exist; one that’s based upon sound fundamental curriculum, one that starts teaching children to read early in life, one that focuses on systems that do work, one that heralds our teachers and makes sure they’ve got the necessary tools to teach, but one that says every child can learn. And in this great land called America, no child will be left behind.”

Nearly eight years later, on January 8, 2009, at General Philip Kearny School in Philadelphia, President Bush delivered his last policy speech. This one was also on education and timed to coincide with the seventh anniversary of the signing of NCLB. In the speech, Bush retraced the origins of the landmark education law, which included a conversation with a high school history teacher who told him that his students could not read.

He also pointed to the law as an example of how Democrats and Republicans can come together in the name of reform; he took the opportunity to thank **Senators Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA)** and **Judd Gregg (R-NH)**, as well as **Congressmen George Miller (D-CA)** and **John Boehner (R-OH)**, with whom he worked to get the legislation passed. “I believe that in signing that bill we enacted the most sweeping education reforms in a long, long time,” Bush said.

Bush addressed some common complaints about the law, but stressed that there was no debating NCLB’s results. Specifically, he mentioned having accountability plans in all fifty states, disaggregated data, a focus on the achievement gap, highly qualified teachers, and research-proven strategies for reading instruction. Bush also highlighted the Teacher Incentive Fund, the law’s supplemental services provision, and greater numbers of charter schools as evidence of the law’s success. “The most important result of the No Child Left Behind is this: Fewer students are falling behind; more students are achieving high standards,” Bush said.

At the end of his speech, Bush addressed the individuals responsible for NCLB’s future, urging the Congress to strengthen and reauthorize the law. “There is a growing consensus across the

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country that now is not the time to water down standards or to roll back accountability,” Bush said. “I call upon those who can determine the fate of No Child Left Behind in the future to stay strong in the face of criticism, to not weaken the law—because in weakening the law, you weaken the chance for a child to succeed in America—but to strengthen the law for the sake of every child.”

President Bush’s complete speech is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2009/01/20090108-2.html>.

Alliance President Bob Wise on the Seventh Anniversary of the No Child Left Behind Act

In his statement on the seventh anniversary of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, said that the nation can celebrate NCLB for setting a national goal of higher education standards for all students and spotlighting problem areas, but stressed that the full potential of the law has yet to be realized.

“It is past time for good aspirations and detailed data to move to action that truly addresses the needs of the nation’s middle and high school students,” Wise said. “In the two years since the law was due to be reauthorized, nearly 2.5 million students have dropped out of high school; over the course of their lifetimes, these dropouts will cost the economy more than \$635 billion in lost wages.

Wise also encouraged President-elect Barack Obama to make the reauthorization of NCLB a priority in his administration. “I can think of no better way for President-elect Barack Obama, who understands that economic recovery will not be successful without education reform, to cement his commitment to an improved education for all Americans than to make this reauthorization a priority,” Wise said. “Important changes to this federal lever will help ensure that desperately needed middle and high school reform really happens around the country. For all the seven-year-olds in the United States, enacting truly comprehensive legislation that focuses real commitment and resources on greatly increasing our nation’s high school graduation rate will provide the birthday present that lasts all their lives.”

Wise’s complete statement is available at http://www.all4ed.org/press_room/press_releases/01082009.



BENCHMARKING FOR SUCCESS: New Report Calls on State Leaders to Look to Highest-Performing Nations When Reforming Education Systems

If state leaders want to ensure that their citizens and economies remain competitive in the new global economy, they must look beyond America’s borders and benchmark their education systems with the best in the world. So says *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*, a new report by the International Benchmarking Advisory Group.¹

“In today’s world, high wages follow high skills, and long-term economic growth increasingly depends on educational excellence,” the report reads. “Unfortunately, American education has not adequately responded to these challenges.”

¹ The International Benchmarking Advisory Group is composed of a panel of governors, state commissioners of education, representatives from the business community, researchers, former federal officials and current state and local officials. It was convened by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, Inc.

As the report points out, U.S. fifteen-year-olds ranked twenty-fifth in math and twenty-first in science achievement on recent international tests. Additionally, the United States, which once led the world in college and university graduation rates, now ranks fourteenth and has the second-highest college dropout rate among twenty-seven of the world's most developed countries.

According to the report, the reason for the decline is not because students in the United States are performing worse, but because other countries have learned from America's success and are catching up or pulling ahead. "As other countries seize the opportunity to improve their education systems so their citizens can benefit from new economic opportunities, the United States is rapidly losing its leading edge in the resource that matters most for economic success: human capital," it reads."

Fortunately, state leaders are already working to raise standards, improve teaching quality, and help low-performing students improve. In fact, thirty-four states that are members of the American Diploma Project Network are actively working toward the goal of making sure that every high school graduate is prepared for college or work. However, as the report points out, by only examining educational practices within U.S. borders, state leaders do not have access to insights and ideas that could make their existing educational policy and improvement process more effective.

"As this important report points out, international benchmarking can provide us with a wealth of information about innovative programs that might meet the needs of our own students," said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education, former governor of West Virginia, and member of the International Benchmarking Advisory Group. "We must widen our search for successful school strategies by taking a serious look at measures our global neighbors are undertaking to improve their student outcomes. ... We owe it to our students to make sure we've done our homework so that they can successfully complete theirs."

To this end, the report suggests five action steps that states can take to build globally competitive education systems. First, states should upgrade their standards by adopting a "common core of internationally benchmarked standards" in math and language arts for grades K–12. Second, states should "leverage their collective influence to ensure that textbooks, digital media, curricula, and assessments are aligned to internationally benchmarked standards and draw on lessons from high-performing nations and states." Third, they should "revise state policies for recruiting, preparing, developing, and supporting teachers and school leaders to reflect the human capital practices of top-performing nations and states around the world." Fourth, states should "hold schools and systems accountable through monitoring, interventions, and support to ensure consistently high performance, drawing upon international best practices." Lastly, states should "measure state-level education performance globally by examining student achievement and attainment in an international context to ensure that students are receiving the education they need to compete in the 21st century economy."

"We are now living in a world without borders, and in order to maintain America's competitive edge into the future we need students who are prepared to compete not only with their American peers, but with students from all across the globe for the jobs of tomorrow," said **Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue (R), cochair of the International Benchmarking Advisory Group.**

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While states must take the lead role in international benchmarking, the report stresses the importance of a federal role as well. It recommends that the federal government offer new funding or allow existing funds to be used to help underwrite the cost for states to take the five action steps described. In addition, the federal government should increase its own investment or focus existing resources toward better research and development in this area to provide state leaders with more and better information about tools for benchmarking and international best practice in education.

And, as states progress toward building internationally competitive education systems, the report recommends that the federal government offer a range of tiered incentives to make the next steps easier, such as increased flexibility in the use of federal funds, greater flexibility in meeting the requirements of federal education laws, and additional funds to help states implement world-class practices. Over the long term, it suggests that the federal government change existing federal laws to align national education policies with the lessons learned from state benchmarking efforts and from federally funded research.

“If states in other countries can shape the response to the global education imperative, states in America must do so as well,” the report reads. “And state leaders have both the authority and an obligation to ensure that students attend globally competitive schools and school districts. America cannot maintain its place in the world—economically, socially, or culturally—unless all of its students gain the skills that allow them to compete on a global scale. The United States will only achieve true international competitiveness when state education policies and institutions are restructured to meet 21st century realities.”

The complete report is available at <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0812BENCHMARKING.PDF>.



THE FORGOTTEN MIDDLE: Students Not on College- and Work-Readiness Track by Eighth Grade Less Likely to Graduate Prepared, Says ACT Report

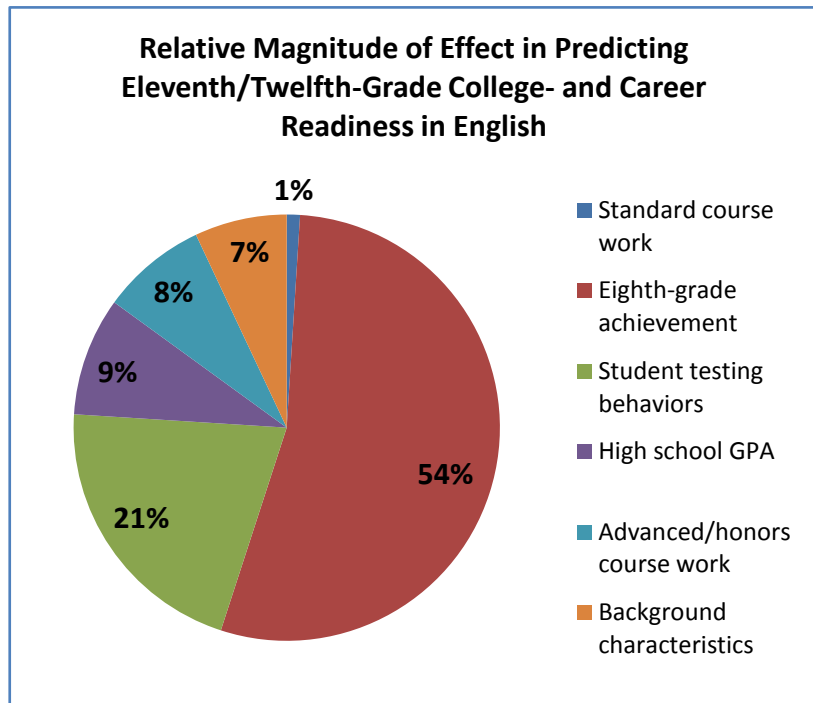
The level of academic achievement students reach by eighth grade has a greater impact on their college- and work-readiness than anything that happens academically in high school. Unfortunately, most eighth graders are not on track to be college- and work-ready upon graduation, according to *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School*, a new report from ACT.

Fewer than twenty percent of eighth graders met all four of ACT’s EXPLORE College Readiness Benchmarks (in English, math, reading, and science). The benchmarks are scores on an ACT-administered test that represent the level of achievement required for eighth graders to be considered on target to be college- and work-ready by the time they graduate from high school. “This means that more than eight of ten eighth-grade students do not have the knowledge and skills they need to enter high school and succeed there,” the report reads. “So although the gates of high school are technically open to all students, for more than 80 percent of them the door to their futures may already be closed.”

ACT finds that, on average, only students who were on target for college- and work-readiness in the eighth grade were actually ready in eleventh or twelfth grade. Students who fell short in the eighth grade, even slightly, were generally not considered ready for college and career as juniors and seniors.

Besides eighth-grade achievement, other predictors of college- and career-readiness the study analyzed included background characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, parent education level, family income, and main language spoken at home; course work; high school grade point average; and student testing behaviors—that is, students’ age and grade level when they take the ACT, whether they retook it, and whether they shared updated course work and grade information if they retested.

However, none of the other predictors of college- and career-readiness studied by ACT had as much impact as eighth-grade achievement. In English, student testing behaviors, with a magnitude of effect at 21 percent, was a distant second-place indicator, followed by high school grade point average (GPA) and advanced/honors course work, as shown in the chart to the right.



ACT finds similar results in science, where student testing behaviors and background characteristics had the next highest effect after eighth-grade achievement; in mathematics, background characteristics were the second-most effective indicator. Separate analyses of racial and ethnic minority students and by students’ family income level (less than \$30,000, between \$30,000 and \$100,000, and more than \$100,000) showed similar results.

The report finds that in order to ensure that students are adequately prepared and on target to be college- and work-ready by eighth grade, interventions must be made in the previous grades. It makes the following four recommendations to boost academic achievement and preparedness for postsecondary success: 1) focus K–8 standards on the knowledge and skills necessary for college- and work-readiness, and require them for all students; 2) monitor student progress and intervene with students who are not on target for readiness, starting in the upper elementary grades and continuing through middle school; 3) improve students’ academic behaviors; and 4) increase federal and state support for schools to implement intervention programs.

The full report can be downloaded at <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ForgottenMiddle.pdf>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: North Dakota and New York at Opposite Ends of the Financial Crisis

The [December 15, 2008 issue of *Straight A's*](#) details how the economic turmoil has hit state budgets and cites research from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities that finds that all but a “handful” of states will face budget shortfalls (not enough revenue to cover expenses) that are projected to total more than \$100 billion in Fiscal Year 2010, which, for most states, will begin on July 1, 2009. In several states, the gap between revenues and expenses accounts for over 20 percent of the state’s general fund, which is the primary operating fund for most states and is used to cover the majority of state expenses, including elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education, Medicaid, corrections, transportation, economic development, and public health and safety.

Unlike the federal government, most states’ constitutions do not allow them to run budget deficits. Therefore, states largely resort to several methods to close gaps between revenue and expenses—cutting spending, tapping reserves from “rainy day” funds, raising taxes, or some combination of the three. Throughout the next few months, the nation’s governors will use their annual state of the state addresses to explain how they anticipate closing the holes in their budgets.

North Dakota: Enjoying Budget Surplus, Hoeven Proposes Large Increase in Education Spending

North Dakota is one of the handful of states that is not expected to face a budget shortfall in Fiscal Year 2010. In his state of the state address on January 6, **Governor John Hoeven (R)** credited the state’s “economic growth and diversification, along with good financial stewardship” for enabling it to “build a surplus and a solid financial reserve for the future.” However, Hoeven also acknowledged the economic downturn that is affecting the rest of the nation and underscored that North Dakota is not immune to its effects.

“As measures are underway nationally to hasten recovery, we in North Dakota must undertake the right initiatives here to build our future,” Hoeven said. “That means we must invest in our future with the kind of thoughtfulness and balance that the people of our state deserve.”

Hoeven’s most notable proposal was the \$500 million Tax Relief and Education Funding Reform initiative, which includes \$300 million in property tax relief, \$100 million in income tax relief, and \$130 million in additional K–12 education funding. Under the plan, Hoeven would use \$300 million from the state’s general fund surplus to reimburse each school district that agrees to reduce its mill levy.² For every dollar the schools give up in property tax revenue, the state will match it with replacement dollars from the surplus. If the state legislature enacts Hoeven’s plan, it would mean that the state would fund 70 percent of the cost of public education, finally meeting a goal set more than twenty-five years ago. Local taxpayers would fund the remaining 30 percent.

² A mill is one-thousandth of a dollar. A mill levy is the number of dollars a taxpayer must pay for every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

The \$130 million increase for elementary and secondary education would boost funding to \$837 million and be used to fund the recommendations of the Commission on Education Improvement, a bipartisan group of state and local education leaders chaired by **Lieutenant Governor Jack Dalrymple (R)** that was created by Governor Hoeven to make recommendations to the state legislature on how to improve funding equity and adequacy among school districts. The commission's recommendations include building student performance, enhancing curriculum, providing strong professional development and mentoring, and improving teacher compensation. Approximately \$15 million of the increase is aimed at paying for all-day kindergarten.

Hoeven also outlined a plan that would boost higher education in North Dakota. "Quality education must not end with the twelfth grade," he said. "To compete in a global economy, our young people need quality higher education and post-secondary technical training to link them to the jobs of the future." Hoeven proposed \$170 million in additional funding for North Dakota's university system, which includes \$40 million in needs-based tuition assistance and grants of up to \$2,000 a year for five years for students in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

Governor Hoeven's speech is available at <http://governor.nd.gov/media/speeches/090106.html>.

New York: Facing a \$13 Billion Shortfall, Paterson Proposes Steep Cuts in Education Funding

New York is more representative of the fiscal crisis that is gripping most of the states. In fact, the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) projects that New York will face a \$13.7 billion budget shortfall in Fiscal Year 2010, an amount that represents 24.3 percent of the state's general fund from Fiscal Year 2009.

Because of the enormous financial difficulties that New York is facing, **Governor David A. Paterson (D)** submitted his budget in mid-December, five weeks before it was due. In it, he proposed more than 135 new or increased taxes and fees, looser restrictions on gambling, and \$9 billion in spending cuts. As part of those cuts, Paterson would cut current education spending by \$698 million and forego the planned \$1.8 billion increase for Fiscal Year 2010 that was a part of a multiyear plan to boost school funding in response to a long-running lawsuit. In total, education funding would be cut by \$2.5 billion in Paterson's proposed 2010 budget.

In a [statement issued with the release of his budget proposal](#), Paterson called the decision to recommend a reduction in school aid a "personally difficult one" for him. "During my time in the legislature, I was one of the strongest advocates for increased education funding," he said. "The grim reality of our current fiscal situation is that all areas of state spending will have to experience reductions. ... Despite these difficult times, I remain firmly committed to the \$7 billion educational investment plan begun in the 2007-08 budget."

In his state of the state address on January 7, Paterson continued to reaffirm his strong belief in education. "This current crisis should teach us that the only way to restore our long-term economic competitiveness is to build the world's best system of education," he said. "We can do

it, but we have a long way to go. Today, three in ten New Yorkers do not graduate from high school and don't even have a chance to go to college. The numbers are even worse for children of color and children from low-income families. We must do better. We must ensure that every child is prepared for college — and that every child can afford to go.”

Paterson noted that innovative educational models have raised high school graduation rates and helped to prepare the state's most disadvantaged children for college. He proposed public-private partnerships to establish new early college high schools throughout the state and an expansion of the SAY YES program, which provides free college tuition to students who meet educational standards. To further help students pay for college, Paterson called for the establishment of the New York State Higher Education Loan Program, which would provide more than \$350 million in affordable loans to students in need.

“I have always fought for more resources for our schools,” he said. “The road to economic competitiveness and renewal runs right through our schools. However, during this downturn, we simply cannot spend more — so we must spend more effectively.”

Governor Paterson's speech is available at
http://ny.gov/governor/keydocs/speech_0107091.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.