



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



TWO OMNIBUS BILLS AND A PARTRIDGE IN A PEAR TREE?: Final Vote on Education Appropriations Bill Could Come Before Christmas

With only five of the twelve annual appropriations bills signed into law by President Obama and the debate on health care overhaul occupying much of the floor time in the U.S. Senate, Congressional leaders are mulling options on how to finish work on the seven remaining appropriations bills before the stopgap continuing resolution expires December 18.

One option currently under consideration is two separate omnibus bills. The first would consist of six appropriations bills, including the one funding the U.S. Department of Education, possibly some jobs-related items, and an extension of expiring provisions in the Patriot Act. The second would include the defense appropriations bill and possibly legislation on estate taxes, and a one-year “fix” to prevent a cut in Medicare payments to physicians.

On December 3, **House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD)** said that he hopes the U.S. House of Representatives can adjourn for the year by December 18. “It is my hope that before [December 18] we will have provision for the passage of all seven of the appropriations bills ... which may be difficult because the Senate has not passed three of those bills on its floor,” Hoyer said. “In one form or another we will have all seven of those bills passed prior to the 18th. [**House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)**], and I all want to avoid another continuing resolution, which we think is not the best way to move forward. We are hopeful that we can accomplish that.”

Earlier this year, on July 24, the House passed its version of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education appropriations bill. While the bill has yet to reach the Senate floor, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed its version of the Labor-HHS-Education bill on July 30.

Under the House-passed bill, the U.S. Department of Education would receive \$64.2 billion for FY 2010, an amount that is slightly more than the \$63.5 billion contained in the version passed by the Senate Appropriations Committee. The U.S. Department of Education received \$62.6 billion in FY 2009.

More information on both versions of the FY 2010 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill is available at http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/straight_as/08102009#EdBill.

Hinojosa Introduces Graduation Promise Act in U.S. House of Representatives

On December 2, **Representative Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX)** introduced legislation that would provide \$2.5 billion in federal funds for low-performing high schools. The bill, the Graduation Promise Act (GPA), was introduced in the U.S. Senate by **Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)** on September 23, and would provide money to districts and states to help them implement effective, research-based reforms tailored to the specific needs of high schools.

As mentioned in the [September 28 issue of *Straight A's*](#), GPA would authorize \$2.44 billion to create a High School Improvement and Dropout Reduction Fund focused on transforming the nation's lowest-performing high schools. Such a fund would help states and local school districts identify high schools with low graduation and student achievement rates and provide them with the resources necessary to implement research-based interventions. Funding would be awarded through competitive grants to schools that partner with local communities, businesses, and other entities to create proven dropout prevention strategies such as mentoring and apprenticeship programs and early college high schools.

The second component of the legislation is a \$60 million competitive grant program that would promote the development and implementation of successful school models that are geared toward students who struggle in conventional education settings.

“Focusing on the nation's lowest-performing high schools will produce immediate gains by turning thousands of dropouts into graduates,” said **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise**. “By introducing the Graduation Promise Act, Representative Hinojosa has shown the will to address this problem; his legislation shows the way.”

More information on the Graduation Promise Act is available at http://www.all4ed.org/federal_policy/legislative_updates/graduation_promise_act_111th.



MAKING A LIST AND CHECKING IT TWICE: Data Quality Campaign Issues Annual Progress Report on State Data Systems

Over the past four years, states have made tremendous progress in developing longitudinal data systems that can track the progress of individual students throughout their education careers, according to the Data Quality Campaign's (DQC) annual progress report on state data systems. Whereas no states reported having all ten essential elements of a high-quality longitudinal data system in place in 2005, eleven states have all ten elements in place today. DQC's report also notes that policy issues previously considered “untouchable,” such as addressing obstacles to linking student growth and achievement data to teachers and principals for the purposes of evaluation, are now being discussed.

“Faced with the need to create a competitive workforce and dramatically improve the quality of America's education system, states have embraced an aggressive policy agenda to better prepare students for postsecondary education and careers,” the report reads. “To inform this agenda, states also have made enormous progress over the past four years on developing robust student-level longitudinal data systems able to track individual student progress over time and through their educational careers.”

Every year, DQC surveys all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to assess states' progress toward implementing the ten essential elements of a high-quality longitudinal data system. This year, for the first time, the report finds that every state is on track to have a longitudinal data system that can follow students from preschool through college by 2011. It

attributes this progress to significant and sustained commitments by states, as well as several actions undertaken by the federal government.

One major federal action is the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which requires every governor and chief state school officer to build longitudinal data systems by 2011 as one of the conditions for receiving a portion of \$53.6 billion in state stabilization funds, which states can use to help close budget deficits. Additionally, requirements for the Race to the Top program and the Statewide Data System grant program include promoting the effective use of data to inform decision-making and teaching to improve outcomes.

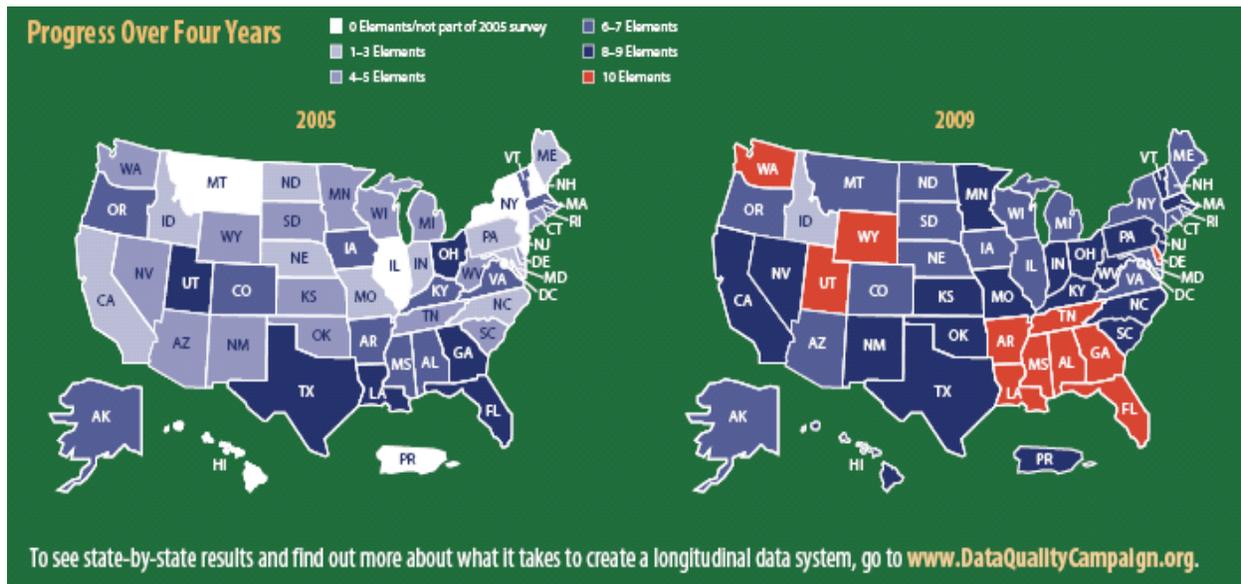
“ARRA has motivated states to remove barriers to data sharing, and it provides a strategic opportunity to engage a broad range of state stakeholders in a thoughtful dialogue around how data systems should be built, expanded and used to inform decisions to improve both individual and system outcomes,” the report reads.

According to DQC’s 2009 survey, and demonstrated in the map below, thirty-one states have eight or more of the elements, only two states have fewer than five elements, and all but one state collect student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation data or collect student-level graduation and dropout data.

DQC’s Ten Essential Elements of a High-Quality Longitudinal Data System

1. A unique statewide student identifier that connects student data across key databases across years
2. Student-level enrollment, demographic, and program participation information
3. The ability to match individual students’ test records from year to year to measure academic growth
4. Information on untested students and the reasons they were not tested
5. A teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students
6. Student-level transcript information, including information on courses completed and grades earned
7. Student-level college-readiness test scores
8. Student-level graduation and dropout data
9. The ability to match student records between the P–12 and higher education systems
10. A state data audit system assessing data quality, validity, and reliability

More information on each element is available at <http://tinyurl.com/yzp9ekb>.



Despite this progress, however, the report finds that many states lack critical elements for addressing college and career readiness and the impact that teachers have on student achievement (elements 5, 6, and 7). For example, only twenty-three states collect transcript information on courses taken, completed, and grades earned. Only thirty-seven states collect college-readiness test scores on exams such as AP, ACT, and SAT. Only twenty-four states have a teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students.

The report notes that creating state longitudinal data systems and collecting data to answer questions about performance is an important first step, but it argues that states must also have policies and practices in place that allow stakeholders throughout the education system to access, understand, and be able to use the information effectively. In an effort to provide greater detail on how states are changing policies and practices to promote linkages across systems, ensure appropriate access to new data and analysis, and strengthen stakeholder capacity to use the information, DQC, in January 2010, will release its first report on the ten actions states can take to ensure the effective use of longitudinal data.

“Education reform is not about sweeping mandates or grand gestures,” said **U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan**. “It’s about systematically examining, learning, and building on what we’re doing right and fixing what hasn’t worked for our children. The Data Quality Campaign has challenged states to expose the good, the bad, and the ugly about our schools and focus the national conversation on how data can lay the groundwork for reform.”

The complete report is available at http://dataqualitycampaign.org/files/DQC_11-19.pdf.



THE PROMISE OF PROFICIENCY: New Report Focuses on Need for Additional Data in “Year 13,” the First Year After High School

If high schools are to succeed in their mission to prepare students for college and careers, they must be given the data and management tools to determine how their graduates are doing in “Year 13”—the first year after high school. So says *The Promise of Proficiency: How College Proficiency Information Can Help High Schools Drive Student Success*, a new report coproduced by the Center for American Progress and College Summit.

“Asking schools to deliver postsecondary success without enabling them to measure postsecondary performance is to demand the impossible,” the report reads. “After all, we wouldn’t ask air traffic controllers to land planes with radars that shut down at 10,000 feet. We wouldn’t let surgeons operate if they could only guess at how previous patients had done. And yet at the moment we are asking high schools to deliver students who can perform in college without giving schools the tools to know whether or how their current efforts are paying off.”

As the report notes, the time when a high school diploma was sufficient to land a well-paying job has passed. Today, the difference in earning power between a high school graduate and someone who finished eighth grade has shrunk to “nil.” On the other hand, college graduates enjoy a tremendous advantage over high school graduates, earning over 74 percent more.

Society also benefits when individuals receive more education after high school. As the report points out, college graduates pay almost \$250,000 more in federal taxes over a lifetime than high school graduates and are more likely to vote, volunteer, exercise, and prepare their own children to succeed in school. Even some college is valuable—full-time workers with some college earn about 22 percent more than those with high school diplomas. For these reasons, the report argues, high schools must prepare all students for success after high school.

According to the report, high schools need to understand two things to better prepare students for their first year after high school, or Year 13. First, high schools need to know the college enrollment rate—the rate at which their graduates are enrolled in postsecondary study in the semester after high school graduation. Second, high schools need to know the college proficiency rate—the rate at which their graduates earn at least one year’s worth of college credits, as applicable to a degree, within two years.

The Promise of Proficiency credits the federal government, through the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, for making publicly available the year-to-year postsecondary education enrollment rate trends of high school students, disaggregated by high school, but the report stresses that high schools also need college proficiency data. Such data—both in the aggregate and for anonymous individual students—would show whether students are still enrolled in college months later and how they are doing academically. By learning how their former graduates are doing in college, high schools can adjust their practices accordingly to better prepare future graduates for postsecondary education. For example, if a high school learns that its graduates are struggling in college math but not in writing, it can promptly take steps to change or improve its math program. The report notes that college proficiency data also provides high schools with valuable information on college graduation and actual college readiness.

Collecting data is not enough. For data to be truly useful, the report reasons that it must be “deployed by educators who trust it, understand it, and use it to launch students in accordance with their mission.” The report cites the work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has made investments to ensure that superintendents, principals, counselors, and teachers can identify patterns and devise solutions in response to data, and to College Summit, which has helped to train educators to use data to make strategic decisions.

As noted in the previous *Straight A’s* article, the federal government, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), has committed \$250 million in grant funding to support states in the further growth and development of their statewide longitudinal data systems. *The Promise of Proficiency* makes several recommendations on how the federal government can sustain this investment and expand recent progress.

First, it suggests that Congress require states receiving funding under the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems grant program be held accountable to the Data Quality Campaign’s ten elements and ten actions that are required to make the systems internally complete and linkable to each other. It also recommends that Congress appropriate \$25 million for the program in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 to make postsecondary data by high school available and useable to all educators. Finally, it asks that Congress reward high schools that demonstrate at least a 10 percent increase in their college proficiency rate over two years.

“Fortunately, the momentum is out there—including within the government—to collect, become comfortable with, and use postsecondary data,” the report reads. “Now the federal government needs to catalyze this progress, putting certain key [ARRA] measures into long-term law and funding the measures already put in place in the Higher Education Opportunity Act.”

The complete report is available at

<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/12/pdf/collegesummitreport.pdf>.



“NO READER LEFT BEHIND”: New Report Finds 1.4 Percent of National News Coverage Dealt with Education

During the first nine months of 2009, only 1.4 percent of national news coverage from television, newspapers, news web sites, and radio dealt with education, according to a new study from the Brookings Institution. The report, *Invisible: 1.4 Percent Coverage for Education is Not Enough*, argues that this “paucity” in education coverage makes it difficult for the public to follow the issues at stake in education debates and understand how to improve school performance.

According to the report, the most common subjects in prominent news stories from January to September 2009 consisted of government (11.3 percent), economics (11.3 percent), and foreign affairs (10.3). As demonstrated in the table below, education ranked twenty-first out of the twenty-six categories featured in the report.

National Media Coverage (Percent of Newshole)¹: January – September 2009

Subject	Percentage	Subject	Percentage
Government	11.3	Race/Gender/Gay Issues	1.9
Economics	11.3	Disasters/Accidents	1.9
Foreign (Non-U.S.)	10.3	Court/Legal System	1.8
U.S. Foreign Affairs	9.8	Media	1.6
Health/Medicine	9.2	Environment	1.5
Business	7.7	Science/Technology	1.5
Crime	6.2	Sports	1.5
Campaign/Elections/Politics	5.0	Education	1.4
Domestic Terrorism	3.4	Defense/Military (Domestic)	1.2
U.S. Miscellaneous	2.7	Transportation	0.8
Lifestyle	2.5	Immigration	0.5
Additional Domestic Affairs	2.4	Religion	0.4
Celebrity/Entertainment	2.1	Development/Sprawl	0

“I think it’s important to make clear that we did not, going into this study, expect that stories about education would overwhelm other subjects [such as war, the huge economic downturn, and acts of terrorism,” said **E.J. Dionne, a senior fellow in governance studies at Brookings and long-time *Washington Post* columnist**, at a [December 2 event on the report’s findings](#). “Coming to this data with that very skepticism, I was still honestly surprised at how little prominent coverage there is of core education questions. However you slice these numbers, and even bearing in mind...that the analysis was based only on prominent stories, it is still remarkable that

¹ Newshole is the space devoted to a topic as a percentage of the overall space available for content (e.g., number of words for print and online, amount of time for radio and television).

the amount of education coverage simply does not match our own rhetoric about how important education is.”

Part of the problem with education coverage is that it is “episodic, reactive, and focused on major events,” the report states. In fact, Dionne pointed out that education coverage would have been cut by about half in some cases and a third in others were it not for stories about President Obama’s speech to incoming students and coverage on the swine flu. Very little coverage was devoted to school policies, ways to improve the curriculum or learning processes, teacher quality, or other matters thought to be crucial for educational attainment.

Credit is given to “citizen-initiated journalism” such as blogs, YouTube videos, and Facebook postings, which are helpful with breaking news and commentary on current events. The report also recognizes local blogs for encouraging debate on education issues. However, it stresses that none of these outlets can replace regular, systematic, and ongoing coverage of education by news outlets.

The report offers a number of recommendations for improving the quantity and quality of education coverage. Its suggestions include: creating a greater awareness within schools that communications are important to their educational mission; increasing the efforts and roles that young people can support and play through student newspapers and social media; helping the reporting profession to be more proactive and less reactive; asking the newspaper industry and other media outlets to reconsider cut backs in education reporting.

The complete report is available at <http://tinyurl.com/ygeoc9m>.

	<p>Happy Holidays from the Alliance for Excellent Education!</p> <p>The Alliance for Excellent Education wishes you and yours a happy holiday season and best wishes for the new year!</p> <p>This is the last issue before the Alliance newsletter—although not the Alliance staff—settles in for a short winter’s nap. The next issue of <i>Straight A’s</i> will be dated January 11, 2010.</p>
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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.