



# Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



## **SHUTDOWN SHOWDOWN: U.S. Department of Education Outlines Potential Impact on Federal Education Programs as Government Shutdown Enters Second Week**

With Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives and Democrats in the U.S. Senate unable to enact a continuing resolution to temporarily fund the federal government, the nation experienced its first federal government shutdown since January 1996. The effects were immediate—federal employees were sent home, federal parks were closed, and the ripple effects began in other areas of the nation's economy.

In education, some of the quickest impacts were felt by Head Start programs, which fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and promote the school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families. According to the [National Head Start Association](#), as many as 19,000 children could be left without Head Start services as twenty-three programs in eleven states did not receive their annual federal grant on October 1. (See articles in the [New York Times](#) and the [Washington Post](#) for more coverage on the shutdown's impact on Head Start programs.)

At the U.S. Department of Education (ED), more than 90 percent of staff—approximately 4,000 people—were furloughed during the first week. Among those exempted were individuals responsible for the “obligation, payment, and support of student financial aid as well as other authorized payments and obligations,” according to [ED's “Contingency Plan for Lapse in FY 2014 Appropriation,”](#) released on September 27.

The approximately \$22 billion in advance appropriations for formula grants to states under Titles I and II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, special education state grants, and career and technical education will not be affected by the shutdown and will be disbursed as scheduled. “These funds,” the contingency plan notes, “are normally obligated on October 1 and provide the second installment of critical funding under annual allocations for the school year that began July 1. ... The Department believes that any delay in obligating these funds could, in some cases, significantly damage state and local program operations.”

Funding disbursements from other programs, however, could be affected, especially as the shutdown moves into week two. For example, ED has warned that a “protracted delay” beyond one week would “severely curtail” the cash flow to school districts, colleges and universities, and vocational rehabilitation agencies that depend on federal funds to support their services.

“Under a shutdown, the likely disruption to Department grant programs will be a potential delay in activities necessary to make competitive and formula grant awards later in the year,” the contingency plan reads. “For the most part, these employees will be furloughed. In addition, citizens and institutions seeking specific information regarding the impact of a shutdown will have limited access to information.”

One such instance of limited access to information is the [nationsreportcard.gov](http://nationsreportcard.gov) website, which, among other things, houses National Assessment of Educational Progress results in reading, math, and other subjects. As of October 6, visitors to the site were greeted with a message reading, “Due to a lapse of appropriations and the partial shutdown of the federal government, the systems that host [nationsreportcard.gov](http://nationsreportcard.gov) have been shut down. Services will be restored as soon as a continuing resolution to provide funding has been enacted.”

The exact date when a continuing resolution (CR) could be enacted remains unknown. Democrats say that **House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH)** could end the shutdown by allowing the House to vote on a “clean” CR that focuses solely on appropriations that contain no unrelated policy provisions—a point Boehner refuted on October 6 during an appearance on [This Week with George Stephanopoulos](#), saying “There are not the votes in the House to pass a clean CR.”

Meanwhile, media outlets such as the *Washington Post* have been reporting that [more than twenty House Republicans](#) would vote for a clean CR, meaning that such a measure could pass if every Democrat joined those twenty-plus Republicans in voting for it.

Looming on the horizon is an October 17 deadline for Congress to agree on legislation to raise the debt ceiling—the legal limit on how much money the U.S. Treasury can borrow to pay the expenses the nation has already incurred. If the debt ceiling is not raised, the United States will default on its debt. As the October 17 deadline approaches, a broader budget agreement—one that would reopen the federal government while also raising the debt ceiling—is a possibility. Such an agreement could also include cuts to entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Social Security.

“I don’t want the United States to default on its debt,” Boehner said on *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*. “But I’m not going to raise the debt limit without a serious conversation about dealing with problems that are driving the debt up. It would be irresponsible of me to do this.”

For more information on how the government shutdown is affecting federal education programs, consult the [cheat sheet created by Education Week’s Politics K–12 blog](#).



**GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN SLOWS DOWN E-RATE REFORM: Individuals Can Offer Feedback on E-rate Expansion and Modernization Through 99in5.org**

As a result of the federal government shutdown, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has temporarily stopped accepting comments from individuals on how to modernize and expand the E-rate program, the federal government’s program for connecting the nation’s schools and libraries to the internet.

However, individuals who want to submit comments during the government shutdown can continue to do so through [99in5.org](http://99in5.org), an Alliance for Excellent Education campaign to expand E-rate to ensure that 99 percent of schools and libraries have the broadband they need within the next five years. Already, more than 1,000 people have signed on to the “99 in 5” petition and 500 people have submitted comments to the FCC in support of this goal.

Before the shutdown, final comments were due to the FCC by October 16. Should the shutdown continue beyond that day, comments will be due on the business day following the return to normal business operations, according to the “[Procedures for Filings in the Event of a Lapse in Funding](#)” released on October 1. “Thus, for example, if a lapse in funding ended on a Monday, the Commission would return to normal operations on Tuesday morning, and, to accommodate the orderly resumption of business, filings would be due on Wednesday,” the notice reads.

Visit [99in5.org](http://99in5.org) to learn more about the E-rate program and sign the petition.



### **PRIMARY SOURCES: Three-Quarters of Teachers Believe Common Core State Standards Will Have a Positive Impact on Students’ Critical-Thinking and Reasoning Skills, New Survey Finds**

Nearly every teacher in the United States (97 percent) has heard of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and three-quarters (77 percent) of math and English language arts (ELA) teachers say the standards will have a positive impact on students’ ability to think critically and use reasoning skills, according to preliminary findings from *Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on Teaching in an Era of Change*, released by Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on October 4. Of the 20,000 public school teachers surveyed, only 1 percent believe the CCSS will have a negative impact on students’ critical-thinking and reasoning skills; 22 percent expect no impact or do not know enough to say.

“I see teachers’ real experiences in the *Primary Sources* findings about the Common Core State Standards,” noted **Naima Lilly, a mathematics educator in New York City**. “I believe the standards are holding students and teachers to higher expectations and providing consistency in a positive way. While implementation can be daunting at the beginning, I’m confident that in the long run it will all be worth it.”

When asked about implementation, 52 percent of math and ELA teachers say implementation in their school is complete or mostly complete; 42 percent say implementation is in its early stages, while only 6 percent say that it has not started. Among elementary school teachers, where implementation is happening first, 67 percent say implementation is going well, compared to 60 percent and 52 percent, respectively, of middle and high school teachers.

While teachers are enthusiastic about CCSS implementation in their classrooms, they acknowledge that implementing the standards is or will be challenging and will require them to make changes in their teaching practice. The top two needs cited by teachers were more planning time to find materials and plan lessons plus quality professional development.

“No one knows teaching like teachers. As a former classroom teacher, I know how important it is to listen when teachers tell us what they need,” said **Vicki L. Phillips, director of education, College Ready, at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**. “The *Primary Sources* data show us that teachers are enthusiastic about tackling the real challenges of implementing the Common Core State Standards. They need support, but also believe the standards will improve student achievement by preparing students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and careers.”

The full *Primary Sources: America’s Teachers on Teaching in an Era of Change* report, to be released in the coming months, will provide additional findings on the CCSS, insight into teachers’ experiences with and opinions on teacher evaluation systems, and more. More information on the report, including the complete preliminary findings, is available at <http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources>.



### **SUSTAINED PROGRESS: New York City’s Small Schools of Choice Continue to Graduate Students at Higher Rates, New MDRC Report Finds**

On average, small public high schools of choice in New York City graduate students at a rate 9.5 percentage points higher than other New York City high schools, according to *Sustained Progress: New Findings About the Effectiveness and Operation of Small Public High Schools of Choice in New York City*, a new report from MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research firm. The schools, which primarily serve disadvantaged students of color, also produce graduates who are more likely to be college-ready and graduate low-income and students of color at higher rates.

“With the nation’s attention focused on turning around failing urban high schools, this study provides convincing evidence that large-scale transformation is possible in an urban public school system,” said **Gordon Berlin, president of MDRC**. “While more certainly needs to be done if all students are to be prepared for college and careers, the small school strategy as implemented in New York provides a blueprint for future reforms across the nation.”

*Sustained Progress* is the third in MDRC’s series of reports examining the role of small schools of choice (SSCs) in improving outcomes for New York City students. Named by MDRC researchers because they are small, academically nonselective, and were created to provide a realistic choice for students with widely varying academic backgrounds, SSCs were created in 2002 when New York City instituted a districtwide high school choice process for all rising ninth graders. At the same time, it closed thirty-one large, failing high schools with an average graduation rate of 40 percent, and opened more than 200 new small schools.

Released in June 2010, the first MDRC report focused on the effectiveness of 105 of the 123 new SSCs and followed a cohort of freshmen who entered high school in 2005 through four years of high school. In January 2012, MDRC added graduation findings for a cohort that began in 2006. Its newest report, released earlier this summer, adds cohort that began in 2007.

As shown in the table below, SSCs experienced an average four-year high school graduation rate of 70.4 percent, compared to 60.9 percent for other New York City high schools. In the most recent year of the study, SSCs posted a graduation rate of nearly 75 percent.

Estimated Effects of SSCs on Four-Year High School Graduation Rates by Student Cohort: Cohorts 1-3					
Cohort	Target SSC Enrollees (%)	Control Group Counterparts (%)	Estimated Effect (%)	P-V value for Estimated Effect	Sample Size
Cohort 1 (2004-2005)	66.6	58.3	8.3 *	0.014	4,473
Cohort 2 (2005-2006)	70.4	59.2	11.2 **	0.000	3,995
Cohort 3 (2006-2007)	74.6	65.1	9.5 **	0.001	3,662
Cohorts 1-3	70.4	60.9	9.5 **	0.000	12,130

The higher graduation rates produced by SSCs held for low-income students and students of color. According to the report, low-income students in SSCs graduated at a rate of 11.2 percentage points higher than their counterparts in other New York City high schools. The same is true for black and Hispanic students, especially black males, who posted a graduation rate of 65.5 percent in SSCs, compared to 52 percent in other high schools. Additionally, special education students and English language learners had graduation rates from SSCs that were 13.7 percentage points and 4.9 percentage points higher, respectively, than their counterparts in other high schools.

“Principals and teachers at the 25 SSCs with the strongest evidence of effectiveness believe that academic rigor and personal relationships with students contribute to the effectiveness of their schools,” the report notes. “They also believe that these attributes derive from their schools’ small organizational structures and from the commitment, knowledge, dedication, and adaptability of their teachers.”

Students attending SSCs were also more likely to earn a New York State Regents diploma, which is generally considered to be the standard graduation credential, rather than a local diploma, which has the least stringent requirements. On average, 45.9 percent of students in SSCs received a Regents diploma, compared to 39.9 percent who did not. Additionally, 40.2 percent of SSC graduates were considered “college ready” in English compared to 33.4 percent of graduates from other New York City high schools.

*Sustained Progress* is available at [http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/sustained\\_progress\\_FR\\_0.pdf](http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/sustained_progress_FR_0.pdf).



**BLUEGRASS GRADS: Percentage of Students Graduating College- and Career-Ready Increases in Year Two of Kentucky State Tests Aligned to Common Core State Standards**

More than half (54.1 percent) of Kentucky’s high school graduates from the Class of 2013 were college- and career-ready, according to new results from the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) assessment, which is aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). That percentage represents an increase of 7 percentage points over the 2011–12 school year and an increase of 16 percentage points over 2010–11.

“In just three years we’ve gone from only a third of our students being ready for college and career to more than half,” said **Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday**. “That’s

around 8,000 students who now have a much better shot at getting a good job, paying taxes and becoming self-sufficient Kentuckians.”

In 2010, Kentucky became the first state to adopt the CCSS in English language arts and mathematics; last year, it became the first state to release test score results that were aligned with the CCSS. During the first year of the test, the percentage of students scoring “proficient” or better in reading and math dropped considerably, which was an expected development given that the new tests are much more rigorous than the old tests.

Kentucky tests students in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, writing on demand, and language mechanics. As shown in the table below, the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or above in reading increased from 46.8 percent to 51.1 percent among middle school students and from 52.2 percent to 55.8 percent among high school students; elementary students’ performance was basically unchanged. In math, more elementary students scored at or above the proficient level; middle school students’ performance was mostly the same; and high school students declined slightly. The strongest gains were at the high school level in social studies and science, and at the middle school level in language mechanics.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PERFORMING AT PROFICIENT/DISTINGUISHED LEVELS				
	Year	Elementary	Middle	High
Reading	2012	48.0%	46.8%	52.2%
	<b>2013</b>	<b>47.8%</b>	<b>51.1%</b>	<b>55.8%</b>
Mathematics	2012	40.4%	40.6%	40.0%
	<b>2013</b>	<b>43.9%</b>	<b>40.7%</b>	<b>36.0%</b>
Science	2012	68.8%	61.8%	30.3%
	<b>2013</b>	<b>68.5%</b>	<b>61.2%</b>	<b>36.3%</b>
Social Studies	2012	59.8%	58.6%	39.5%
	<b>2013</b>	<b>59.3%</b>	<b>59.2%</b>	<b>51.3%</b>
Writing On-Demand	2012	31.7%	41.4%	43.9%
	<b>2013</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>43.4%</b>	<b>48.2%</b>
Language Mechanics	2012	49.1%	38.4%	50.7%
	<b>2013</b>	<b>53.7%</b>	<b>43.8%</b>	<b>51.4%</b>

“We expect that as students acquire more foundational learning and teachers become more comfortable with teaching the new standards, scores in this area will continue to gain ground,” said Holliday. “The Kentucky Core Academic Standards are harder, more in-depth than previous standards and challenge students to think critically, creatively and to problem solve rather than memorize for a test.”

The complete results are available at <http://1.usa.gov/17e0GBZ>.



## **BLENDING LEARNING 2.0: New Implementation Guide Helps School Leaders Develop and Implement an Effective Blending Learning Model**

A new report from [Digital Learning Now!](#) (DLN), [Getting Smart](#), and [The Learning Accelerator](#) (TLA) offers recommendations to school leaders on how to develop and implement an effective blended learning model<sup>1</sup> that focuses on accelerating student learning for college and career readiness. The report, *Blended Learning Implementation Guide Version 2.0*, reflects feedback

<sup>1</sup> The report defines blended learning as a “formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace that is at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.”

from schools and districts, developments in the field, and educational technology trends since its original release in February.

“There is growing momentum around the country to explore new approaches to blended learning,” said **Digital Learning Now! Executive Director John Bailey**. “This guide is for those state, school, and district leaders who want to build a new, more personalized learning environment in order to achieve high academic student outcomes.”

The report includes a four-part process for blended learning implementation that includes exhibits, case studies, and additional resources to help school leaders create conditions for success and planning, followed by implementation and continuous improvement. It adds to a growing field of resources, including [Digital Promise](#) and the Alliance for Excellent Education’s [Project 24](#), that help school leaders plan for and ultimately realize the potential that technology has for improving student outcomes.

*Blended Learning Implementation Guide Version 2.0* is available at <http://www.digitalllearningnow.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/BLIG-2.0-Final-Paper.pdf>.

### **Digital Learning Transition MOOC-Ed Connects Education Leaders from Sixty Countries and All Fifty States to Develop a Plan to Implement Digital Learning**

The Digital Learning Transition Massive Open Online Course for Educators (MOOC-Ed), led by the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University, kicked off its second course on September 30 with more than 1,700 education leaders from sixty countries and all fifty states signed up to participate. Registration for the course is open through Friday, October 11 at <https://courses.mooc-ed.org/dlt2/course>. There is no cost to participate.

The course, which runs from September 30 through November 24, utilizes the Alliance’s [Project 24 Framework](#) with an emphasis on developing a systemic plan for how digital learning interacts with all areas of the education system, including curriculum and instruction, professional learning, data and assessment, academic supports, budget and resources, use of time, and technology and infrastructure.

The course provides self-directed, peer-supported learning opportunities in a flexible, yet structured approach. The goal of the course is to provide participants with carefully selected text and video resources, access to experts from around the country through panels and discussions, and structured discussions around topics critical to the digital learning transition. The main project of the course includes developing the goals, challenges, strategies, and action steps for digital learning in a district, school, classroom, or organization.

***Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress*** is a free biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events 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. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor; Cyndi Waite; and Kate Bradley.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, DC–based national policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all students, particularly those who are traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit [www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org). Follow the Alliance on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/all4ed](http://www.twitter.com/all4ed)), Facebook ([www.facebook.com/all4ed](http://www.facebook.com/all4ed)), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog ([www.all4ed.org/blog](http://www.all4ed.org/blog)).