



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



OBAMA SIGNS OMNIBUS SPENDING BILL: Bill Provides Big Funding Boost to Early Childhood Programs, Restores Much of Education Funding Cuts Imposed by the Sequester

The U.S. Department of Education will receive approximately \$67.3 billion in discretionary funding in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 under the \$1.1 trillion omnibus spending bill President Obama signed into law on January 17. The bill, which is composed of all twelve regular appropriations bills, restores much of the education funding cuts imposed by the sequester, but falls \$800 million short of the pre-sequestration amount of \$68.1 billion from FY 2012. The measure received rare bipartisan support in the U.S. Senate, which passed it by a vote of 72 to 26, and the U.S. House of Representatives, where it passed by a vote of 359 to 67.

The bill includes an increase of more than \$1 billion for Head Start—an increase of approximately \$600 million compared to the pre-sequestration level—and includes \$250 million for a Race to the Top competition for grants to states to help them develop, enhance, or expand high-quality preschool programs for children ages four and over and from low- and moderate-income families.

“Both of these investments improve access to high-quality early learning experiences for children from birth to kindergarten,” said **U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), chairman of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee**, in a [speech on the Senate floor](#). “I truly believe that these investments lay the foundation for future prosperity by better preparing America’s next generation.”

Another big change in the bill was for the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, which targets the nation’s lowest-performing schools and is slated to receive \$505 million, slightly less than the \$534 million the program received in FY 2012. Policy language in the omnibus bill added two turnaround models to the original list of four. The new models reflect language included in the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee’s proposal to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The first new model, referred to as “whole school reform,” is a strategy which must be based on a “moderate level of evidence that the program will have a statistically significant effect on student outcomes.” The second model is one that has been designed by a state and approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education. Previously, schools receiving SIG money were restricted to four turnaround models that required (1) replacing the principal; (2) replacing the principal and replacing 50 percent of the school staff; (3) becoming a charter or privately managed school; or (4) closing the school. Language in the bill also allows the three-year grant period to be extended to five years, which would allow SIG grantees additional planning time.

Although education programs received a significant boost, many fell short of the funding levels from FY 2012, the year before the sequester imposed a 5 percent across-the-board cut to all federal programs. Title I will receive \$14.4 billion, slightly less than the \$14.5 billion the program received in FY 2012. The Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy program will receive \$158 million, slightly less than in FY 2012. Special education grants will receive \$11.47 billion, less than the \$11.58 billion received in FY 2012. Career and technical education grants to states will receive \$1.1 billion, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (afterschool) will receive \$1.14 billion, federal TRIO programs will receive \$838 million, and GEAR UP will receive \$302 million—all of those totals are slightly less than in FY 2012.

President Obama’s High School Redesign program, for which he requested \$300 million in his FY 2014 budget, was not funded. The program would have redesigned high schools to better prepare students with the real-world skills necessary to find a job right after high school graduation or go to college.



A CHANGE IN CLIMATE: Obama Administration Issues New Recommendations on School Discipline in Effort to End School-to-Prison Pipeline

On January 8, the Obama administration released new recommendations on classroom discipline designed to end disparities in how students of different races are punished for violating school rules. The recommendations, a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, discourage disciplinary policies that push students out of school and into the justice system in favor of ones that foster safe, inclusive, and positive learning environments while keeping students in school. The recommendations are not binding but are meant to assist states, school districts, and schools in creating safe and positive school climates.

“Effective teaching and learning cannot take place unless students feel safe at school,” [said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#). “Positive discipline policies can help create safer learning environments without relying heavily on suspensions and expulsions. Schools also must understand their civil rights obligations and avoid unfair disciplinary practices. We need to keep students in class where they can learn. These resources are a step in the right direction.”

The school discipline guidance package includes a “Dear Colleague” letter describing how schools can meet their legal obligations under federal law to administer student discipline without discriminating against students on the basis of race, color, or national origin, as well as a directory of federal technical assistance and other resources related to school discipline and climate available to schools and districts. At the heart of the package are three guiding principles drawn from emerging research and best practices to help states, districts, and schools improve school climate and school discipline:

- 1) **Climate and prevention.** Schools that foster positive school climates can help to engage all students in learning by preventing problem behaviors and intervening effectively to support struggling and at-risk students.
- 2) **Expectations and consequences.** Schools that have discipline policies or codes of conduct with clear, appropriate, and consistently applied expectations and consequences will help students improve behavior, increase engagement, and boost achievement.

- 3) **Equity and continuous improvement.** Schools that build staff capacity and continuously evaluate the school’s discipline policies and practices are more likely to ensure fairness and equity and promote achievement for all students.

The school climate issue is of great importance to the Alliance for Excellent Education, which has issued three reports on the issue in the last six months. Findings from the reports are based on data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights’s Civil Rights Data Collection, which provides information about inequities in students’ access to rigorous course work, the distribution of experienced and licensed or certified teachers, and the application of school discipline policies.

Based on this data, the [Alliance reports](#) that schools struggling most with providing a positive school climate more often disproportionately serve students of color and low-income students. These students are also more likely to be suspended than their white and wealthier peers. In many cases, these suspensions do more harm than good as middle and high school students subjected to harsh school discipline policies and practices—such as suspensions and expulsions—are more likely to disengage from the classroom and course work, which increases their chances of dropping out.

“Current ‘zero-tolerance’ policies are doubly detrimental to students,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**, in a [statement on the Obama administration’s discipline recommendations](#). “They keep students out of school and away from the classroom, causing them to lose critical learning time and fall further behind, and they fail to address the underlying issues for their behavior.”

Instead of zero-tolerance policies, the [Alliance recommends](#) positive school discipline practices such as “restorative justice,” which focuses on repairing the harm a student’s actions have caused and preventing future incidents. Other successful practices include positive behavior reinforcement, culturally relevant pedagogy, and teacher training in classroom management and engaging instruction to see effective results from any of these strategies. Additionally, the [Alliance finds](#) that implementing rigorous and engaging curriculum aligned with college- and career-ready standards can foster positive school climates in which students are motivated to succeed, achievement gaps narrow, and learning and outcomes improve.

“A routine school disciplinary infraction should land a student in the principal’s office, not in a police precinct,” said **U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder**. “This guidance will promote fair and effective disciplinary practices that will make schools safe, supportive, and inclusive for all students. By ensuring federal civil rights protections, offering alternatives to exclusionary discipline and providing useful information to school resource officers, we can keep America’s young people safe and on the right path.”

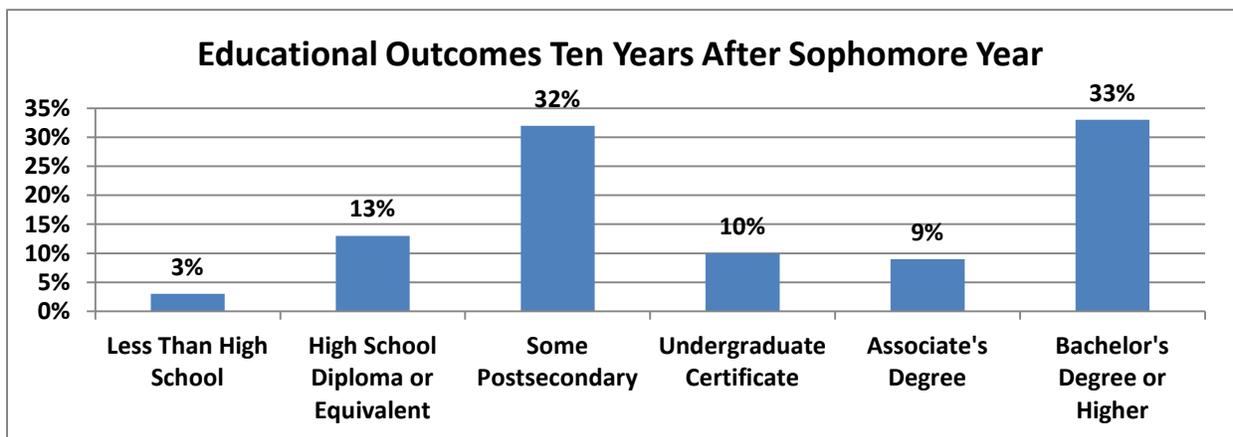
More information on the Obama administration’s school discipline guidance package is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>.

Additional information on the Alliance’s school climate work is available at <http://tinyurl.com/hsclimate>.



TEN YEARS LATER: New NCES Longitudinal Study Tracks Educational Outcomes of High School Sophomores from 2002

Eight years after their expected high school graduation, 33 percent of individuals from a nationally representative sample of then–high school sophomores had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, while 13 percent progressed no further than completing high school (see chart below). The study, *Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at 2002 High School Sophomores 10 Years Later*, released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on January 9, represents the third and final follow-up survey to the ELS:2002 and draws on data collected in 2012, when survey participants were about twenty-six years old.



When asked about their current activities, 63 percent of survey participants said they were working for pay only, while 19 percent were working for pay and taking postsecondary courses. Five percent said they were taking postsecondary courses only and 13 percent said they were neither working for pay nor taking postsecondary courses. Of those who had lost a job since January 2006, 45 percent had not completed high school and 40 percent only had a high school credential, compared to 19 percent who had a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Among study participants who were employed as of 2012 but had not finished high school, 20 percent were working in “food preparation and serving occupations.” Among individuals whose highest level of education was an associate’s degree, the most frequently reported current occupation (18 percent) was in the category of “office and administration support.” The most frequently reported current job (13 percent) by individuals who obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher was “education, training, and library occupations.”

The complete report is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014363.pdf>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Nation’s Governors Focus on Technology in Schools, Common Core State Standards, and Restoring Funding for Education

With the start of the New Year, the nation’s governors are outlining their policy agendas in their annual state of the state addresses to state policymakers and citizens. Already, expanding the use of technology in the classroom, the Common Core State Standards, and increases in education funding are common topics. Indeed, after cutting education funding in the face of declining revenues during the Great Recession—per-pupil spending in at least thirty-four states was lower

in the 2013–14 school year than it was before the recession, according to a [September 2013 report](#) from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities—some of the nation’s governors are hoping to restore education funding that was cut in lean years.

Alabama: Bentley Touts Teacher Pay Increase

“Nothing is more important to a child’s education than his or her teacher,” **Alabama Governor Robert Bentley (R)** asserted in his [state of the state address](#) on January 14. “I truly appreciate the sacrifices our teachers have made,” he added.

The governor dedicated the bulk of his speech to health care in the state, but at several points he touched on the importance of education. Last year, he said, teachers in the state received a 2 percent pay increase. He included another 2 percent pay increase in this year’s budget, as well, for teachers and support personnel.

Bentley applauded the state’s creation of the Governor’s College and Career Ready Task Force—an initiative that brings together business, industry, and education leaders to improve education standards in the state. In 2014, the governor intends to expand on that success by creating a Statewide Workforce Council of business and industry leaders that will advise secondary school and college educators on the types of skills that students need to secure jobs in the region. This program will also expand dual-enrollment programs across the state, allowing more students to work toward high school and two-year college degrees simultaneously.

In his budget, Bentley also included increased funding for early education programs, which he says are “making a real difference in the lives of Alabama’s children” and are closing the achievement gap between low-income children and their peers.

Georgia: Deal Proposes Nearly \$50 Million to Connect Schools to High-Speed Internet

Georgia Governor Nathan Deal’s (R) budget for Fiscal Year 2015 dedicates more than 80 percent of new revenue to education, with nearly 70 percent going toward K–12. Like many states slowly coming back from the Great Recession, Georgia is focused on restoring and increasing education funding.

Deal outlined his funding requests in his January 15 [state of the state address](#). The additional education funding will be used to “restore instructional days, eliminate teacher furloughs, and increase teacher salaries.” The ultimate goal, Deal said, is to provide school districts with the resources necessary to address their most critical needs.

Of the proposed education funding increases, Deal allocated \$44.8 million for connecting schools and classrooms to high-speed internet and equipping them with digital resources like laptops and other devices to encourage and improve digital learning.

“It is my goal that every child in any classroom in our state will have access to the best instruction possible, and this can be done by expanding the availability of our online learning,” Deal said. He also commented on the continued need to end the so-called school-to-prison pipeline that is fueled by high school dropouts. “High school dropouts with no marketable skills become the

feedstock for our prisons,” he said, impassioned. Deal encouraged lawmakers, teachers, parents, and citizens to focus energy on increasing the state’s high school graduate rate.

Deal’s other education proposals focused primarily on increasing funding for technical education to encourage students to pursue high-need fields in the state, including welding, health-care technology, and information technology.

Kentucky: Beshear Willing to Make “Harmful Cuts” to Improve Education

Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear (D) did not mince words about his goals for the future of education in his [state of the state address](#). “I am determined to find money to reinvest in education—even if I have to make harmful cuts in other areas to do so,” he said.

Beshear applauded Kentucky for being a forerunner in adopting and implementing the Kentucky Core, standards that are in line with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Kentucky schools have been using the high-quality standards since 2011, which is well ahead of the rest of the nation.

In addition to the CCSS, Kentucky is only the second state to adopt the Next Generation Science Standards, Deal proudly noted. He added that the state is currently working on creating standards for social studies and the arts and humanities, as well.

Kentucky was recently awarded a \$44.3 million Race to the Top grant to improve accountability and transparency in the state’s early learning programs. Beshear plans to seek legislation to implement the goals for the state’s program.

New York: Cuomo Wants to Bring Classrooms into the Twenty-first Century

“The best long-term economic development strategy is to have the best education system in the world, and that is our focus,” said **New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (D)** in his January 8 [state of the state address](#). “We are in the midst of an education reinvention.”

Cuomo followed this strong statement with ways to improve New York’s education system, including a call to bring classrooms into the twenty-first century. He lauded a \$2 billion investment to bring classrooms “up to speed” with access to high-speed internet and the digital tools necessary to facilitate learning and teaching.

With access to digital technology, students more easily obtain the skills they need to succeed in a twenty-first-century economy, Cuomo remarked. In addition, parents can communicate more easily with teachers, and teachers can get more personalized and directed training they need.

To improve teacher quality and retention, Cuomo proposed creating a teacher excellence fund that would award bonuses to teachers based on performance evaluations.

“Teachers who are rated ‘highly effective’ on their evaluations, which is the highest statewide rank, would be eligible to receive \$20,000 as a bonus, in performance pay, which is on average 27 percent of their salaries,” Cuomo explained.

Idaho, Indiana, and South Dakota Governors Hold Differing Views on the Common Core

The Common Core State Standards have been a “common” theme in this year’s state of the state addresses. Many governors feel strongly about it—whether for or against it—and used their speeches to advocate for a particular viewpoint to the state legislature and citizens.

Idaho Governor Butch Otter (R) began his January 6 [state of the state address](#) with remarks on education. He lauded the state’s efforts at implementing the Idaho Core Standards. His goal is for the state to focus on education from kindergarten all the way through a productive career; he dubbed this “K-through-Career.”

In addition to the standards, Otter pledged that every elementary and middle school in Idaho will be connected to high-speed internet by the end of Fiscal Year 2015.

Even more enthusiastic in his support for common standards was **South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard (R)**, who addressed a common myth that the standards are a federal initiative in his January 14 [state of the state address](#).

“The standards were not written by the federal government, are not required by the federal government, and South Dakota receives no federal funds that were contingent upon adopting the Common Core State Standards,” Daugaard said. “I hope we will work together this year to protect our students without undermining the important goals of rigorous and competitive content standards.”

In addition to supporting the standards, Daugaard pledged an additional \$1.5 million in funding for scholarships for students pursuing high-need programs in technical areas.

Not all governors are as committed to the Common Core State Standards. Turmoil over the standards in Indiana has dotted national and state news throughout the last year. **Indiana Governor Mike Pence (R)** reflected the state’s opposition to the standards in his January 14 [state of the state address](#).

“Hoosiers have high expectations when it comes to Indiana schools. That’s why Indiana decided to take a time out on national education standards,” Pence said. “When it comes to setting standards for schools, I can assure you, Indiana’s will be uncommonly high.”

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 traditionally underserved, graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship. For more information, visit www.all4ed.org. Follow the Alliance on Twitter (www.twitter.com/all4ed), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).