



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



FUTURE READY: Alliance for Excellent Education and U.S. Department of Education to Lead Future Ready Schools Initiative with Support from LEAD Commission

Appearing with President Obama and more than 100 district school superintendents at a White House convening, **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** today announced a series of regional summits and the unveiling of vast resources for district superintendents who take the U.S. Department of Education's *Future Ready District Pledge* to develop the human and technological capacity needed to personalize learning using digital tools.



“This Future Ready initiative is an unprecedented coordination of public, nonprofit, and private resources to ensure that every student has access to the best learning opportunities through effective technology and quality teaching,” Wise said. “Today the nation’s school districts are taking a big step to make every student future ready. Already, more than 1,000 district superintendents have taken the *Future Ready District Pledge*—a number the Alliance will work to increase over the next year.”

The regional summits are part of the Future Ready Schools Initiative—a bold new effort announced today by President Obama and **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** to help school district leaders nationwide develop and implement sustainable, forward-thinking plans for pairing effective technology deployment and quality teaching. The Alliance for Excellent Education and the U.S. Department of Education are leading the initiative with support from the Leading Education by Advancing Digital (LEAD) Commission.

Open to any school district that has taken the *Future Ready District Pledge*, the regional summits will take place in 2015 in up to twelve of the following metropolitan areas: Atlanta; Baltimore; Chicago; Dallas; Denver; Phoenix; Pittsburgh; Raleigh; Seattle; San Francisco; St. Louis; and Providence.

Led by trained facilitators skilled at using technology and digital learning effectively, each regional summit will serve thirty to forty district teams consisting of three to five members. The summits will focus on a comprehensive set of issues that drive student learning including: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; professional learning; technology, networks, and hardware; budget and resources; data and privacy; use of time; and community partnerships.

Highlighting the experiences of districts in each region, the summits will offer district leaders tangible ways to build capacity among their teams and throughout their districts. During each summit, district teams will develop an action plan to support their school leaders and teachers as they implement digital learning.

“The Future Ready Schools Initiative comes at a critical time as districts embrace college and career readiness as the goal for all students and recognize the potential of digital tools to help teachers personalize learning for each student,” Wise said. “It will help districts avoid pitfalls that are sometimes associated with technology purchases and planning while ensuring that school leaders, teachers, and students receive the support and tools they need to implement technology effectively.”

To provide ongoing support for the districts attending the regional summits and reach the hundreds of additional districts that cannot attend in person, the Alliance is building a Future Ready Schools Leadership Network that will provide continuing support and tools to all districts that take the *Future Ready District Pledge*. As part of the network, which is sponsored by AT&T and McGraw-Hill Education, more than twenty-five national organizations representing administrators, parents, teachers, and parents will combine their resources with numerous state and local organizations in an unprecedented effort to ensure that every school district is truly future ready.

Specifically, the network will offer (1) a Future Ready assessment and customized report to guide the development of concrete district action plans; (2) webinars and expert advisory chats; (3) examples of successful districts; (4) a community of mentoring districts; and (5) tools for tracking progress as districts implement their plans.

“Through the regional summits and the Future Ready Schools Leadership Network, districts will receive resources and support to ensure that local technology and digital learning plans align with instructional best practices, are implemented by highly trained teachers, and lead to personalized learning experiences for all students, particularly those from traditionally underserved communities,” Wise said. “Future Ready schools will have empowered teachers and leaders, students who take charge of their own learning, and parents who are engaged and informed. The end result is a more personalized approach to teaching and learning that ensures that all students have the skills they need to succeed.”

To learn more about the Future Ready Schools Initiative, visit www.FutureReadySchools.org.



FCC CHAIRMAN PROPOSES \$1.5 BILLION INCREASE IN FUNDING FOR E-RATE

On November 17, **Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Tom Wheeler** proposed a \$1.5 billion permanent increase in the annual E-rate spending cap, as well as a series of policy changes designed to give schools and libraries more options to purchase affordable high-speed internet connections. The proposal is the latest step in a plan to modernize and expand the E-rate program so that 99 percent of the nation’s students will have access to high-

speed internet connections in their schools and libraries within five years. The FCC is expected to vote on the proposal on December 11.

“Almost two-thirds of American schools cannot appropriately connect their students to the twenty-first century,” Wheeler said in a conference call with reporters. “Basic connectivity is now inadequate connectivity.”

If adopted, Wheeler’s proposal would raise the E-rate annual spending cap to \$3.9 billion. To pay for the increase, Wheeler would raise the fees that a consumer or business pays on their telephone bills by about 16 cents a month or \$1.90 a year, an amount the FCC characterized as “less than a cup of coffee” in a [fact sheet on the proposal](#). “While the impact on consumers will be small, the impact on children, teachers, local communities and American competitiveness will be significant,” the fact sheet notes.

According to the FCC, schools and libraries across the geographic and socioeconomic spectrum have “significant” work to do to meet long-term high-speed internet targets. For example, 68 percent of all school districts report that not a single school in their district can meet these targets. Additionally, 41 percent of rural public schools and 31 percent of suburban and urban public schools lack access to fiber networks sufficient to meet modern connectivity goals for digital learning. Even schools in affluent areas struggle to meet speed targets, with only 39 percent meeting the goal, compared to only 14 percent of schools in low-income rural and urban areas.

Wheeler’s proposal follows FCC action in July to target \$1 billion annually to expand Wi-Fi connections in the nation’s schools and libraries. At the same time, the FCC took several steps to make E-rate dollars go further, including increasing transparency on how they are spent and what prices are charged for E-rate services.

Released on the same day as Wheeler’s proposal, a new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Leading Education by Advancing Digital (LEAD) Commission, finds that African American, Latino, low-income, and rural students are more likely to be in schools with slow internet access (10 Mbps or less) than their peers and less likely to be in schools with high-speed broadband internet (100 Mbps or more) needed for digital learning.

“The connectivity gap highlighted by the report stands in the way of our students’ academic success, and the nation’s economic prosperity,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Chairman Wheeler’s plan would bring today’s schools out of the internet dark age and into the digital age. I urge the FCC to increase funding for E-rate as proposed by Chairman Wheeler because the only way to close the achievement gap is to close the connectivity gap.”

The report, *Schools and Broadband Speeds: An Analysis of Gaps in Access to High-Speed Internet for African American, Latino, Low-Income, and Rural Students*, was authored by **Dr. John B. Horrigan**, a leading authority on broadband adoption and use. It represents a first-of-its-kind analysis of students’ access to high-speed broadband along racial, income, and geographic lines. Highlights from the analysis include the following:

- Students in heavily minority schools are half as likely to be in schools with high-speed internet as students in heavily white schools.
- Low-income students are twice as likely as affluent students to have slow internet access at their schools.
- Students in remote rural America are twice as likely as urban/suburban students to have slow internet access at their schools.

“The analysis findings shine a light on the critical importance of providing students with more access to updated technology regardless of race, income, or zip code,” said **LEAD Commissioner and Founder and CEO of Common Sense Media Jim Steyer**. “We applaud Chairman Wheeler for committing to close the rural fiber gap to achieve connectivity targets for high-speed internet. We also call on the FCC to close the gaps in access among low-income students and communities of color to bridge the digital divide among all students.”

According to the analysis, 2.75 million low-income students either lack access to high-speed internet or are disproportionately represented among students with slow internet access. Also, students in remote rural areas are half as likely as students in large suburban areas to have access to high-speed internet.

In writing the report, Horrigan merged and analyzed two datasets from 2011: (1) Common Core of Data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics, and (2) the National Broadband Map, which is compiled by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the FCC.

Schools and Broadband Speeds is available at <http://99in5.org/resources-news/equity/>.



POST-ELECTION AFTERMATH: Alliance Webinar Examines Election’s Impact on Federal Education Policy

Republicans picked up eight seats in the U.S. Senate on election night to take control of that chamber for the first time since 2006 and expanded their control in the U.S. House of Representatives by gaining a dozen seats. The move to Republican control of the U.S. Congress could bring action in early 2015 on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB); no increases in education spending for the next couple of years; and an unclear future for some of the president’s competitive grant programs such as Race to the Top, according to panelists during a November 10 webinar hosted by the Alliance for Excellent Education and Washington Partners, LLC.



“I’m going to switch back into the more bullish category of Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “For the first time, I’m actually thinking something could move. The question is whether it could move, whether a House bill can

conference with the Senate, but, even more importantly, reach an agreement that the president will sign. I think he's probably inclined to want to sign something, but I don't think he's going to sign just anything."

Joining Wise on the webinar were **Phillip Lovell, vice president of policy and advocacy for comprehensive high school reform at the Alliance for Excellent Education; Ellin Nolan, president of Washington Partners, LLC; and Della B. Cronin, principal at Washington Partners, LLC.**

Among the biggest changes the panelists discussed were the changes in leadership of the committees responsible for education policy. Even before the election, longtime education champions **Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA)**, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), and **Representative George Miller (D-CA)**, top Democrat on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, announced their retirements. With the Republican takeover of the Senate, **Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** is expected to become chairman of the HELP Committee.

"It goes without saying, Senator Alexander is among the most knowledgeable people on the Hill when it comes to education," Lovell said. "He was Secretary of Education; he was president of the University of Tennessee and was a former governor. He knows the issue very well and is very passionate about it."

Lovell characterized Alexander as "eager to legislate" and also predicted some movement on ESEA "early into the next year."

Although Republicans will control the Senate in 2015, they are short of the sixty votes necessary to override a filibuster, which Democrats can use to prevent a measure from being brought up for a vote. Nevertheless, Republicans will chair the committees and write legislation.

"Although the Republicans don't have sixty votes in the Senate, they'll still be running the show," Lovell said. "And they'll be running the show in a much different way, I think, than what their Democratic, soon-to-be predecessors did."

One way that the Senate could operate differently under Republican control is by being more active in holding oversight hearings on Obama administration policy.

"I think you'll see lots of requests for information, lots of letters asking for status updates," Cronin said. "I think that [**House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN)**] and Mr. Alexander are not fans of the waivers, and I think will probably put some pressure on Secretary Duncan to prove the value of this effort to them."

Nolan agreed that Kline and Alexander would like to reduce the power of **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan**. One way to do so is by choosing not to fund competitive grant programs such as Race to the Top that "leave a lot of money in the hands of the Secretary of Education to decide where it goes," Nolan said. She added that competitive programs such as

School Improvement Grants, Race to the Top, and Investing in Innovation (i3) have “very little, if any” Republican support and face a questionable future in terms of funding.

The easiest way to limit the secretary’s power is by passing an ESEA reauthorization that could make waivers obsolete, but Nolan said that Republicans would need to build some Democratic support for the bill. “If they don’t build any Democratic support for either bill, it’s kind of a guaranteed veto,” Nolan said. “The administration likes the waivers, far better than either the bill that the House passed last year or the one that Mr. Alexander has developed.”

One interesting component in the waiver debate is timing. Last week, in a [November 13 letter to chief state school officers](#), the U.S. Department of Education offers guidance for how a state can request a renewal of its waiver. Requests must be submitted no later than March 31, but congressional action on ESEA could muddle the process.

“States are going to have to go along with that process, but it’s understandably very frustrating because as they’re going through this process where they’re submitting several hundreds of pages of documentation to the Department of Education, if ESEA passes, some of that policy will likely change,” Lovell said. “Changes that will be made to the waiver policy will, in all likelihood, just provide more flexibility to states, rather than less. So, it’s not going to be a matter of states having to do a lot more; it’s that they have agreed to comply with certain things that, under new policy set by Republican Congress, they wouldn’t have to do.”

Archived video from the webinar is available “on demand” at <http://all4ed.org/webinar-event/nov-10-2014/>.



CHANGING PRIORITIES: State Prison Reform Would Make More Funding Available for Education, Says New Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Report

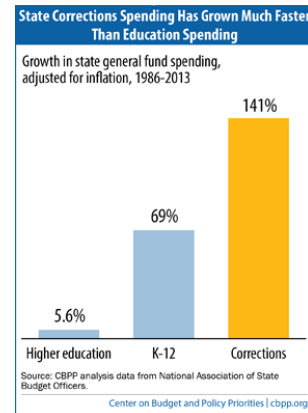
A report released October 28 by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) suggests that state criminal justice reform would free up millions of general fund dollars that states could use to improve their preschool, K–12, and higher education systems, especially for low-income areas.

“Even as states spend more on corrections, they are underinvesting in educating children and young adults, especially those in high-poverty neighborhoods,” the report notes. “This is not sound policy. State economies would be much stronger over time if states invested more in education and other areas that can boost long-term economic growth and less in maintaining extremely high prison populations.”

Reordering state criminal justice systems and investing in education would make it possible to combat several disadvantages that students face, according to the report, specifically for students in low-income areas who tend to face the most drawbacks from budget cuts. Namely, the increase in available funding could help expand access to high-quality preschool; reduce class sizes in high-poverty schools; revise state funding formulas that counteract inequities created by schools receiving most of their local funds from property tax (which heavily favors wealthier

districts); and increase college enrollment and graduation rates—as more state funding would be available, keeping the cost of tuition for students and their families low.

Spending on state corrections has grown at a much faster pace than that of education spending. According to the report, *Changing Priorities: State Criminal Justice Reforms and Investments in Education*, overall state spending on education grew by 69 percent from 1986 to 2013, compared to the massive increase of 141 percent that states spent on corrections in that same time span. In addition, the report notes that at least thirty states provided less general funding for schools since the economic recession in 2008. The states that made the most significant cuts to general funding for K–12 since the recession—Alabama, Arizona, and Oklahoma—are among the ten states with the highest incarceration rates, the report notes.



The number of inmates in the United States has increased greatly in the past few decades. In 1978, there were about 270,000 people behind bars in the U.S. In 2013, that number was 1.3 million.

The report’s authors, **Michael Leachman, director of state fiscal research with the state fiscal policy division of CBPP**, and **Michael Mitchell, policy analyst with CBPP’s state fiscal policy division**, assert that lawmakers could decrease these costly trends through several measures without harming public safety. Among their recommendations are the decriminalizing or reclassifying of certain low-level felonies, such as drug possession, that have contributed significantly to recent prison inflation, and not resorting to prison for those who violate parole or probation.

A few states made strides in streamlining their criminal justice system, feeding the dollars saved back into investments such as education. California’s Proposition 47, also known as the Safe Neighborhood and Schools Act, reclassifies drug and theft crimes to misdemeanors in hopes of reducing the costly state prison population and reinvesting those funds elsewhere. The proposal, which passed on November 4, would reserve 25 percent of those savings to support at-risk youth in schools. The proposition is estimated to generate hundreds of millions of dollars annually that would have otherwise served the second largest prison population in the United States.

Changing Priorities: State Criminal Justice Reforms and Investments in Education is available at <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4220>.

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; Ariana Witt; 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).