



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



ESEA DELAY: House Consideration of Bill to Rewrite NCLB Stalls as Support Wanes Among Conservative Republicans

Expected to pass a bill to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), on February 27, Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives instead pulled the bill from consideration after statements from the Club for Growth and Heritage Foundation opposing the bill left conservative members wavering in their support.

At issue is the role that the federal government plays in education. Both the Club for Growth and Heritage Foundation want a complete retreat from a federal role in education and do not think the bill, known as the Student Success Act, goes far enough toward that goal. In fact, included among the Club for Growth's [policy recommendations for education](#) is to "close down the U.S. Department of Education and end the federal government's role in education."

In the latest "[Federal Flash](#)," the Alliance for Excellent Education's weekly five-minute video update on federal education policy, **Jessica Cardichon, the Alliance's senior director of policy and advocacy**, calls the organizations' opposition to the Student Success Act "stunning, considering how little of a federal role in education is actually left by the Student Success Act." Cardichon notes that the bill would remove accountability safe guards for underserved students, eliminate most federal education programs, and no longer require Title I funds for low-income students to go to low-income schools."

For these reasons and more, the White House issued a [veto threat for the bill](#), saying it "abdicates the historic federal role in elementary and secondary education of ensuring the educational progress of all of America's students, including students from low-income families, students with disabilities, English learners, and students of color."

The path forward for the Student Success Act is unclear, with **House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN)** saying in a [February 27 statement](#) that he expects to have an opportunity to finish the bill "soon." In the same statement—and perhaps in response to the far right's opposition to the bill—both Kline and **Todd Rokita (R-IN), chairman of the Subcommittee of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education**, reiterated the "conservative reforms" in the legislation.

The Student Success Act was not listed on the [weekly House schedule](#) for consideration during the week of March 2.

In the U.S. Senate, bipartisan negotiations continue between Republican and Democratic staff on the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP). At focus are big issues such as assessments, the level of accountability for schools and districts, and funding for individual programs. **Senate HELP Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** has said that he wants the Senate to vote on a bill by April.

The bipartisan negotiations in the Senate are a key component of the process because any bill to rewrite NCLB will need support from at least six Democrats to advance in the Senate—assuming that all fifty-four Republicans are united in their support for the bill. But, as was seen in the House, that could be a big assumption.



BUILDING A STEM PATHWAY: Summer Bridge Program Closes Achievement Gaps and Increases Secondary School Students' Interest in STEM, New Alliance Report Finds

Building a STEM Pathway: Xavier University of Louisiana's Summer Science Academy, a new report released on February 19 by the Alliance for Excellent Education, examines how Xavier's summer bridge program for middle and high school students prepares students of color to succeed in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. This extensive report—interspersed with [video highlights of the program](#)—provides a lens into the kind of academic and social learning that build students' competencies in STEM course work. (Click on the image above for a short video overview of the bridge program.)



“In a nation where students of color are now the majority of public school enrollees, increasing the diversity of the U.S. STEM workforce is vital to maintaining the nation's scientific and technological leadership,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Xavier's Summer Science Academy provides an important model for how to do so.”

Xavier University of Louisiana—a historically black university that enrolls only 3,000 students—continues to rank first nationally in the number of African American students who earn degrees in biological/life sciences and the number of African American graduates who go on to complete medical school. The university's nine STEM bridge programs, which serve about 600 secondary school students each summer, strengthen students' mastery of knowledge and skills in mathematics, science, and literacy. The programs teach students to apply their new skills in collaborative study groups and authentic laboratory settings.

At a [release event](#) broadcast live from the Alliance's brand new Gerard and Lilo Leeds Conference and Advocacy Center, **Norman Francis, president of Xavier and 2006 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom**, described the rationale behind the program's creation. “The program was really designed to bring students in, show them the rigors of learning and the

rigors that were going to be required in the science fields,” Francis said, “but also to show them what an excitement comes when one learns and gets the confidence of knowing that they can do what many people thought they couldn’t do at all.”

Other speakers at the release event included **Loren Blanchard, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Xavier; Michael Smith, special assistant to the president and senior director of cabinet affairs for My Brother’s Keeper at the White House; and former and current students from Xavier’s Summer Science Academy.** (Archived video from the event is available at <http://all4ed.org/webinar-event/feb-19-2015/>.)

Xavier also works to improve the effectiveness of secondary school math and science teachers by partnering with middle and high schools to help teachers design curriculum and enact new teaching strategies in math and science education. Nationally, the number of math and science teachers has increased steadily, but students in schools with high concentrations of low-income students and students of color continue to struggle to find teachers with credentials in STEM teaching. As the only historically black college or university involved in the 100Kin10 Network, a partnership committed to the goal of preparing 100,000 excellent STEM teachers by 2021, Xavier University has committed to producing 110 new STEM teachers by 2021 who are specifically qualified to work with urban high-needs schools and districts.

The report offers several recommendations to states and districts for improving the participation of underrepresented student groups in STEM careers:

- Set high-performance expectations for college and career readiness for all students.
- Improve collaborations between K–12 and postsecondary institutions to facilitate advancement along the pathway to a STEM degree.
- Redesign learning environments based on research of human development and learning.
- Improve systems to ensure equal access to high-quality, effective STEM teachers.

The report also calls for increased federal funding to scale up the most effective STEM programs with the goal of improving mathematics and science education for all students.

Building a STEM Pathway: Xavier University of Louisiana’s Summer Science Academy, as well as several short videos showing the academy in action, are available at <http://all4ed.org/stem/>.



“RICH SCHOOL, POOR SCHOOL:” *Hechinger Report* Provides Closer Look at College Admission Counseling in Two Very Different Schools

A recent article in *The Hechinger Report* by **Erin Einhorn** paints an excellent picture of the haves and have-nots of college admission counseling through two very different schools. On one end of the spectrum is the private Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, with a \$30,200 annual tuition, where a team of five with a combined 169 years of experience serves 200 seniors and 600 underclassmen. Nineteen miles to the south in Detroit is Osborn Collegiate Academy of Math, Science and Technology, where, according to the article, one counselor, **Andrea Jackson**, serves 400 students with decisions far greater than which college to attend:

“I need to start job-searching. I need help really bad,” sighed a 17-year-old senior who turned up one recent morning in Jackson’s office in the school’s poorly heated library. The girl hopes to enroll in a nursing program at a local community college next year but needs money now to make it through the end of high school. Jackson promised to call a colleague with connections at a nearby Burger King, then advised the girl to reach out to family members who could help her next year if she needs cash.

Acknowledging that comparing such polar opposites “provides an extreme example of the disparities in college counseling based on socioeconomic status,” the article provides an eye-opening look into the daily challenges facing students—and counselors—in many of nation’s most disadvantaged schools:

At a time when the high-tech economy has made a college degree an essential ticket to a good job, and when unraveling the college-application process is more complicated than ever, students in poor urban and rural school districts—many of them low-income, racial minorities, and the first in their families to go to college, meaning they need the most help—can expect little or no college advising, while wealthier kids in suburban and private schools have small armies of counselors.

The *Hechinger Report* article is available at <http://hechingerreport.org/rich-school-poor-school/>.

COLLEGE COUNSELING IN HIGH SCHOOLS: New ECS Report Offers “Low-Cost, High-Impact” Solutions for States

A recent report from the Education Commission of the States notes that states’ increased focus on boosting college readiness and postsecondary completion rates “has not been backed” by efforts to improve college counseling in secondary schools.

“The reality is that states are unlikely to meet postsecondary completion goals if current trajectories persist,” the report notes. “However, recent research points to counseling approaches correlated with increased odds of college-going that, along with appropriate supports once students do enter college, may help states make progress on achieving postsecondary completion targets. This is especially true among low-income students.”

The report notes that some states are taking a “build it, and that will come” model that fails to provide appropriate supplemental support for efforts such as web portals, individual learning plans, and mandates that all students complete a college application as part of their high school graduation requirements. For example, counselors, students, and parents are sometimes unaware that online portals exist, and even when they are, insufficient access to the internet outside of school—especially among low-income families—limits usage.

The report identifies several “low-cost, high-impact approaches” that have been successful, including short videos on anticipating return on investment from postsecondary education, college “coaches” who exclusively focus on preparing students for college, and summer text-messaging programs that remind college-intending graduates of key deadlines.

College Counseling in High Schools: Advising State Policy is available at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/16/69/11669.pdf>.



THE NEW FORGOTTEN HALF: Individuals with “Some College” but No Credential Fare No Better than High School Graduates, Finds New Report

As the educational demands of today’s economy have increased, 86 percent of on-time high school graduates attend college within eight years after graduation, according to *The New Forgotten Half and Research Directions to Support Them*, a new report from the William T. Grant Foundation. At the same time, however, large numbers of individuals—especially those attending community college—fail to earn any credential at all, placing them on a career track that is no better than individuals with only a high school diploma.

“The new forgotten half, those individuals who have followed advice to go to college but have failed to attain any credential, have lower labor market payoffs than individuals who attain a credential,” the report notes. “Without systematic improvements, we suspect that these young people will continue to be deprived of good jobs and future careers, and will, perhaps, have a lower quality of life than those in similar positions in the past.”

According to the report, only 20 percent of community college students earn a bachelor’s degree within eight years after enrolling, while 33 percent earn an associate’s degree or certificate; the remaining 46 percent earn nothing. Those who earn credentials enjoy significant earnings advantages. Bachelor’s degree recipients earn 34 percent more than individuals with only a high school diploma; those with associate’s degrees earn 22 percent more; and individuals with professional certificates earn 13 percent more, the report finds.

“Students, educators, and policymakers need to see that ‘some college’ has little payoff; that baccalaureate degrees often have low odds and substantial obstacles; and that sub-baccalaureate options, such as associate’s degrees and certificates, have good payoffs and can provide a dependable path to a baccalaureate degree.”

Not only do individuals with “some college” miss out on the increased earnings associated with credentials, they typically also face the additional burden of paying off debt. “Students with no credentials have no payoff [and] waste scarce time and money, incurring substantial college debt—nearly as much as students who got certificates (\$15,664 v. \$15,995),” the report notes.

To help individuals who enter college complete a credential, the report identifies several research needs, including information for college students on pathways to credentials and job outcomes for various credentials, alignment of high school and college standards, linkages between colleges and employers, and better practices for high school college counselors.

“Counselors are the main source of information about college for many high school students, particularly those of low-socioeconomic status, and their advice can dramatically impact student choices,” the report notes. “Research can inform that advice by giving counselors relevant information and successful procedures targeted at low-income or academically struggling youth.”

The New Forgotten Half and Research Directions to Support Them is available at <http://wtgrantfoundation.org/newforgottenhalf>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Governors in Tennessee and North Carolina Focus on Increasing High School Graduation Rates

Last month, [the U.S. Department of Education announced](#) that the high school graduation rate in the United States hit an all time high of 81 percent for the Class of 2013. In several recent state of the state addresses, the nation's governors have recognized the gains their respective states have made in increasing their high school graduation rates while also offering new ideas on how to raise the rates even higher.

Tennessee: Gov. Bill Haslam Sets Sights on High School Graduation Rates and Common Core State Standards

During his [February 9 state of the state address](#), **Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam (R)** reminded Tennesseans and the general assembly, "There is nothing more important to our state than getting education right," a plan he believes centers around improving the graduation rates of Tennessee high school students.

To support an increase in high school graduation rates, Haslam proposed an additional \$2.5 million to support [Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support \(SAILS\)](#), a program that gives high school seniors extra support in math so that they might avoid remedial courses in college.

Haslam also pointed to the importance of his Drive to 55 initiative, which aims to increase the number of Tennesseans with a certificate or degree beyond high school to 55 percent by 2025, up from the current 32 percent. The plan is supported by the Tennessee Promise, which guarantees high school graduates two years at a community college or technical school. Haslam pointed to the program's success, saying "this year, of our 65,000 high school seniors, 58,000 of them applied for the Tennessee Promise."

Haslam also spoke of a need to continue "doing all we can to work with educators and support them as professionals who are shaping the future of our children and our state," proposing \$100 million dollars for increasing teacher salaries.

"We know that a big part of success is to have a great teacher leading every classroom," he said. "Just like with state employees, we want to recruit, retain, and reward the best and brightest educators. A big piece of doing that is paying good teachers well."

Though much of his discussion on education focused on high school graduation rates, Haslam reminded Tennesseans of the state's ongoing efforts to examine the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and decide if they are right for Tennessee schools. Haslam, [a previous strong supporter of the CCSS](#), is asking the public to review the standards and make comments through a state-run website. The site has already received more than 80,000 comments. Those comments will be taken into consideration by six advisory teams, who will then propose any changes to the State Board of Education.

It is estimated that removing the CCSS could [cost the state roughly \\$4 million](#) over three years. Additionally, many of the state’s superintendents continue to strongly support the CCSS.

“Tennessee has received national attention for making historic gains in student achievement,” [Randy Frazier, president of the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents told *The Tennessean*](#). “That is why we say to the General Assembly this morning, ‘please, do not derail our momentum.’”

North Carolina: Gov. McCrory Focuses on Supporting Teachers

Though his state currently boasts the highest high school graduation rate in its history, **North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory (R)** spoke to the continuing need to improve education in his [February 4 state of the state address](#), noting that “a key part of any jobs plan is a quality education so students can be competitive in a global economy.”

McCrory made several proposals to enhance the teaching profession, saying he wanted to make the state a “teaching destination, not a layover for our state’s best and brightest.” He reminded state legislators and those in his cabinet of his experience as a student teacher at North Rowan High School in Spenser, North Carolina.

“I thought I had the perfect lesson plan for my first day of teaching,” McCrory said. “I worked for days preparing an hour’s worth of teaching material. But I ran out of material after 10 minutes. ... Teaching is hard.”

McCrory said the state must fulfill its promise to raise a teacher’s base pay to \$35,000 a year and “give our teachers and students the gift of time by testing less and teaching more,” adding that his administration is working to deemphasize “unneeded testing by next year.”

In addition, McCrory suggested expediting teacher certification in the state to “help our schools hire the teachers they need now” by taking into consideration the amount of experience and expertise an individual has in the subject matter. “This bureaucratic process must change,” McCrory said, “We want, and should be encouraging, accomplished people who want to join the teaching profession. The bureaucracy should never, never, stand between their talents and our children.”

McCrory also mentioned a continued focus on job training in community colleges and the need to bring Wi-Fi access to all classrooms and long-distance learning for students.

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](https://twitter.com/all4ed)), Facebook (www.facebook.com/all4ed), and the Alliance’s “High School Soup” blog (www.all4ed.org/blog).