



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



NCLB REWRITE MOVES FORWARD: Senate Education Committee Unanimously Passes Every Child Achieves Act, Bill Could Reach Senate Floor by Memorial Day

By a unanimous 22–0 vote, the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) approved legislation on April 16 to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The Every Child Achieves Act, jointly written by **HELP Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** and **Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)**, the committee’s top Democrat, maintains NCLB’s annual assessment schedule, requires states to report on the performance of various subgroups of students, but removes the law’s adequate yearly progress requirement and the sanctions that accompanied it.

“The consensus that the committee found is the same that Senator Murray and I found,” [Alexander said in a statement](#). “That consensus is this: Continue the law’s important measurements of academic progress of students but restore to states, school districts, classroom teachers and parents the responsibility for deciding what to do about improving student achievement.”

The bill was universally praised for the bipartisan nature in which it was written, but it has drawn criticism for its failure to include critical safeguards for low-performing schools and traditionally underserved students.

“To live up to ESEA’s legacy of advancing equity and providing opportunity for every child, we join with numerous civil rights and business groups in urging that further significant improvements be made to the bill to create the law that America’s children deserve,” [said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan](#). “Every family and every community deserve to know that schools are helping all children succeed—including low-income students, racial and ethnic minorities, students with disabilities and students learning English. And they deserve to know that if students in those groups fall behind, their schools will take steps to improve, with the strongest action in the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools.”

While requiring states to report data on the performance of individual schools and student subgroups, including students of color, low-income students, and others, the Every Child Achieves Act grants states the flexibility to determine when to intervene and how. Similarly, it requires states to set goals for assessments and high school graduation rates but does not require states to take action when goals are missed.

During the committee's consideration of the bill, several senators offered amendments to increase state accountability for improving low-performing schools and students. **Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT)** offered an amendment to ensure that traditionally underserved students receive support when they demonstrate low performance. **Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)** offered an amendment to ensure that high schools failing to graduate one-third of their students are identified for improvement and made eligible to receive support.

Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) also offered an amendment on high schools that would target students of color, low-income students, and other traditionally underserved students. Baldwin's amendment would ensure that these students graduate from high school with the deep content knowledge, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and other skills that prepare them for college and today's fastest-growing jobs, particularly those in science, technology, engineering, and math.

None of these amendments had enough support to pass so they were withdrawn before being voted upon, but all three senators plan to offer the amendments again when the bill goes to the Senate floor.

"I appreciate efforts by Senators Elizabeth Warren, Chris Murphy, and Tammy Baldwin that would have held states responsible for improving graduation rates in low-performing schools," [said Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education.](#) "These proposals would have delivered much needed attention and resources to help African American, Latino, low-income students, and other traditionally underserved students graduate from high school prepared for college and a career. As the Every Child Achieves Act moves to the Senate floor, I urge all senators to work to address these shortcomings."

In the [April 24 episode of the Alliance for Excellent Education's "Federal Flash,"](#) **Phillip Lovell, vice president of federal policy and advocacy at the Alliance,** said that the Every Child Achieves Act could hit the Senate floor shortly before Memorial Day or shortly thereafter. Lovell added that the bill is expected to be debated for about two weeks.

The Student Success Act, the House of Representatives version of a bill to rewrite NCLB, continues to languish. It was expected to pass the House on February 27, but was pulled from consideration after conservative members began to waver in their support.

Speaking at the Education Writers Association national seminar on April 21, **U.S. Representative Todd Rokita (R-IN), chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education,** said the bill was "ready to be voted on" but did not give a definite date. Instead, Rokita said that he expected the House to vote on the bill sometime during this session of Congress, which could mean anytime in 2015 or 2016.



“BUILDING A FOUNDATION”: New Alliance Case Study Provides Inside Look at Rural School District’s Turnaround

A new Alliance for Excellent Education digital case study demonstrates how one predominantly low-income school district dramatically improved student engagement in the classroom and increased high school graduation rates through project-based learning (PBL) and the effective use of technology. The case study, which includes short video segments with educators and students, focuses on Talladega County Schools in Alabama, where technology is an important component that builds students’ abilities to solve real-world problems; master college- and career-ready academic standards; and develop skills in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and other deeper learning competencies. (For a short video profile of Talladega, click on the image to the right or visit <https://youtu.be/n8sGdsDOU4E>.)



Talladega: Project-Based Learning Ignited by Technology

“Talladega County Schools is a glowing example of how an entire community can come together to raise high school graduation rates and learning outcomes,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “Talladega County Schools’ commitment to the use of project-based learning and technology to prepare students for college and a career has resulted in access to high-quality instruction, challenging digital content and tools, and dedicated teachers for students who need them most,” said Wise.

Located fifty miles east of Birmingham, Talladega County Schools serves an overwhelmingly low-income population—75 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Faced with that challenge, as well as poor test scores and low high school graduation rates, a leadership team of administrators, teachers, students, community members, and county business leaders visited model schools across the nation. The Talladega team focused on schools that leverage technology to engage students, increase the rigor of student course work, improve student attendance, and focus on deeper learning.

“We looked at a variety of [instructional] methodologies to determine what would work best for us,” said **Vicky Ozment, Talladega’s coordinator of instruction and personnel**. “We really liked the technology [component] and how it enhanced learning at all of the schools [we visited], so we knew it had to be part of what we ended up doing.”

The case study, “Building a Foundation: How Technology-Rich Project-Based Learning Transformed Talladega County Schools,” describes how the district implemented a PBL model using a digital learning framework to engage students with an extended inquiry learning process that paired complex questions with carefully designed tasks.

As a result, Talladega County increased its districtwide high school graduation rate from 72 percent in 2007 to 90 percent in 2014. Talladega also experienced changes in student attitudes

toward learning and improved academic outcomes. Survey results at Talladega’s Childersburg High School show that 83 percent of students felt the new PBL model was more challenging than previous curricula. At Winterboro, a neighboring high school, graduation rates improved from 63 percent in 2009 to 90 percent in 2014. The district that once struggled to keep students interested in learning is now working to implement a 1:1 digital-device-to-student program. Because of its efforts, the Alliance featured Talladega at its third annual [Digital Learning Day in 2014](#).

“Building a Foundation” identifies key factors that supported Talladega County’s transformation and includes several recommendations for schools and school districts interested in changing their own learning models. Strengthening school culture, increasing student engagement, integrating technology, partnering with community organizations, and increasing professional development and support for teachers all contributed to Talladega’s success, turning this once struggling school system into a model for district transformation.

“Building a Foundation: How Technology-Rich Project-Based Learning Transformed Talladega County Schools” is available online at <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/talladega/>.



ABOUT TIME: Public Schools Use Expanded Learning Time to Close Student Achievement Gaps

More than 1 million students, the majority of whom are from low-income families, attend expanded-time schools, twice as many students as in 2012, according to a new report from the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) and the Education Commission of the States (ECS). For the first time, traditional public schools, rather than charter schools, account for the majority of expanded-time public schools. Noncharter public schools now represent 61 percent of the nation’s 2,009 expanded-time schools. Expanded-time schools increase learning time for all students—not just subgroups of students, operate with at least a seven-hour school day, and have a substantially longer day or year when compared to neighboring public schools.

“While all students can benefit from additional learning time, high-poverty students benefit the most,” according to the report, *Learning Time in America: Trends to Reform the American School Calendar*. At a time when affluent families are “devoting increasing amounts of time and money to broaden their children’s educational and enrichment opportunities ... high-poverty students ... often do not have access to the same kind of out-of-school family and community learning resources—a reality that exacerbates and widens both opportunity and achievement gaps.” To address these disparities, the report continues, more schools are expanding the school day and/or school year to increase learning time.

Nearly 70 percent of expanded-time schools serve populations where at least 75 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. State policymakers increasingly are turning to expanded learning time to transform low-performing schools and provide greater educational equity between groups of students.

In 2013 and 2014, state legislatures passed more than forty laws that either established rules around learning time or created ways for schools and/or districts to expand learning time. Since then, at least thirty-five districts across more than ten states have implemented a longer school day and/or school year in select schools, according to the report.

Similarly, recent changes in federal policy have fueled the increase in expanded-time schools, the report states. Under the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, for instance, schools can choose from four different reform models to improve student achievement. But, 95 percent of SIG-funded schools have selected either the “transformation” or “turnaround” model, both of which include increased learning time as a central reform element. About two-thirds of SIG schools have implemented some form of increased learning time, according to the NCTL report.

Additionally, in 2012, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) implemented a system of “waivers” granting states flexibility from certain provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Under the waiver system, ED granted states greater flexibility in the use of some federal funding, which has enabled schools to redesign and expand learning time. Through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program, for example, school districts can receive grants for expanding enrichment opportunities for students through before-school, after-school, and summer programs. While the 21st CCLC originally required schools to use these funds for programs operated during “non-school hours,” the waiver system now permits schools to use the federal funds “to increase learning opportunities for all students by redesigning and significantly expanding school hours,” according to the NCTL report. Twenty-six states and Puerto Rico have waivers to use the 21st CCLC funding for expanded learning time.

But simply adding extra time to the school day will not ensure that struggling students receive the support and interventions they need to succeed academically. Schools must use that additional learning time in meaningful ways. As part of its [Common Core and Equity video series](#), the Alliance for Excellent Education spoke with educators in California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maryland, and Ohio about how they have reinvented their use of time to implement the Common Core State Standards. The video, [Common Core Implementation: Use of Time](#), explores how schools and districts in these five states have restructured their school-day schedules to better support instruction and educator development.

Learning Time in America: Trends to Reform the American School Calendar is available at <http://www.timeandlearning.org/publications/lta>.



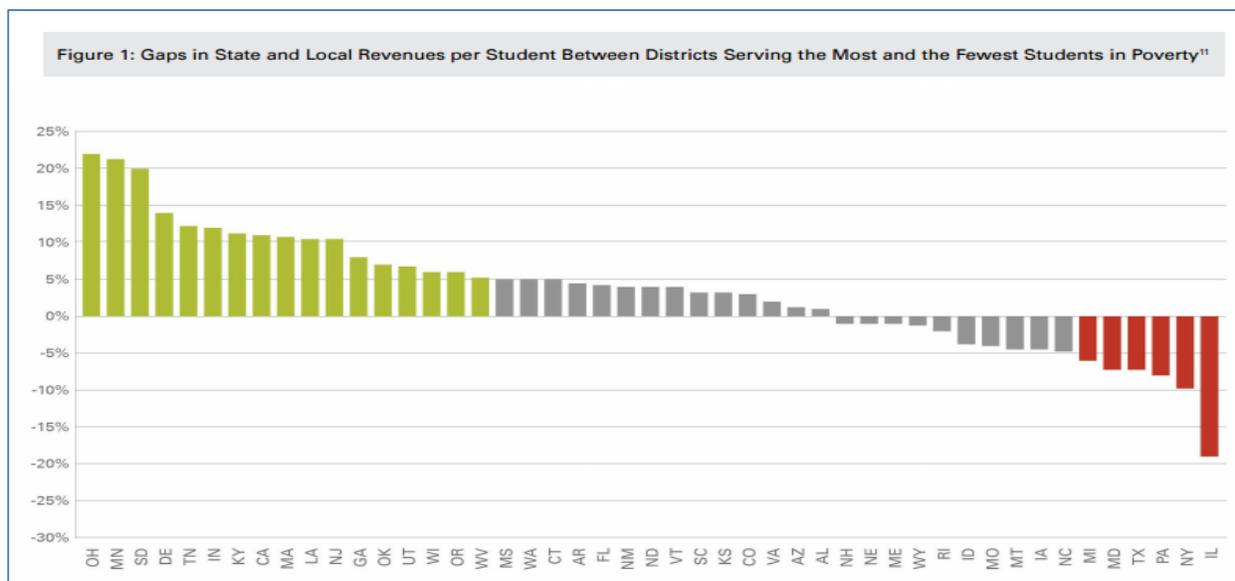
FUNDING GAPS 2015: New Research Shows Widening Funding Gap Between Richest and Poorest School Districts

School districts that serve the highest percentages of low-income students and students of color receive significantly less in local and state funding than districts that serve predominantly white and affluent students, according to a new report from the Education Trust (Ed Trust) and a separate analysis by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). And that funding gap is widening.

In *Funding Gaps 2015*, Ed Trust finds that the highest poverty school districts nationwide receive about \$1,200, or 10 percent, less per student in local and state funds than the lowest poverty districts. Meanwhile, districts serving predominantly students of color receive approximately \$2,000, or 15 percent, less per student than districts serving mostly white

students. In the report, Ed Trust focuses specifically on local and state funding data from Fiscal Years (FYs) 2010–12, the most recent years available. The analysis excludes federal funding because federal dollars typically provide supplemental and targeted support to specific student groups. The analysis does not compare funding between individual districts, but rather examines funding levels for quartiles of school districts with the highest and lowest poverty levels and the quartiles with the highest and lowest concentrations of students of color.

The researchers also examined funding levels between quartiles of districts within each state and found considerable variation in the levels of funding the poorest and wealthiest districts receive. As shown in the graph below, the highest poverty districts in six states receive between 6 percent and 20 percent *less* in state and local funding than the lowest poverty districts in their respective states, according to Ed Trust. Seventeen states, meanwhile, provide the highest poverty districts with between 5 percent and 22 percent *more* in local and state funds. The remaining twenty-four states provide roughly equal levels of funding between high- and low-poverty districts. The report excluded three states whose school district structures did not conform to the model established for the report’s within-state gap analysis.



“Our data show that the students needing the most supports are given the least,” said **Natasha Ushomirsky, K–12 senior data and policy analyst and coauthor of the report**. “As conversations on how to improve achievement for our nation’s youth, particularly those who start school academically behind, are hotly debated in statehouses across the nation, closing long-standing funding gaps must be addressed. While money isn’t the only thing that matters for student success, it most certainly matters. Districts with more resources can, for example, use those funds to attract stronger teachers and principals and to offer students more academic support.”

But simply providing the *same* level of funding between districts is not sufficient to close the gaps in achievement that exist between poor and affluent students. “[T]o close achievement

gaps,” the report states, “schools need funding that is *equitable*—funding that accounts for the fact that it simply costs more to educate low-income students, many of whom start school academically behind their more affluent peers.” To account for those additional needs, Ed Trust repeats the national analysis assuming it would cost districts 40 percent more to educate a low-income child than an affluent one.¹

The analysis accounts for the additional needs of low-income students, and in doing so, the researchers determined that the highest poverty districts nationwide receive about \$2,200, or 18 percent, less per student than the lowest poverty districts. Furthermore, under the revised calculation, the number of states providing significantly less funding to their poorest districts jumped from six to twenty-two.

Data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows a similar funding gap. According to the data for FY 2012, the highest poverty districts receive 15.6 percent less in state and local funding than the lowest poverty districts, an increase from 10.8 percent in 2002. Additionally, NCES identified twenty-three states where school districts with the highest poverty levels receive less state and local funding than the lowest poverty districts, with some states providing as much as 33 percent less in state and local revenue to the highest poverty districts. It also identified twenty states that spend fewer state and local dollars in districts with the highest concentrations of students of color, with some districts receiving 30 percent less compared to districts that serve predominantly white students.

“In too many places today, right now, around the country, we still have school systems that are fundamentally separate and unequal,” **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** said during [a press conference call](#) about the data. “Not only should the funding, at minimum, be equal, but children who come from disadvantaged communities, who come to school needing extra resources, need additional help. They need additional support.”

Funding Gaps 2015 is available at <http://edtrust.org/resource/funding-gaps-2015/> and ED’s data on school district expenditures is available at http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/Fy11_12_tables.asp.

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; Kristen Loschert; 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).

¹ Ed Trust bases the 40 percent on the formula for Title I funding but acknowledges that some research estimates “it costs about twice as much, or more, to educate a low-income student to the same standards as a higher income student.”