



Straight A's

Public Education Policy And Progress



SENATE PASSES NCLB REWRITE: Bill to Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Faces Uphill Climb to Becoming Law

Earlier this month, the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives each passed bills to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In the coming weeks, designees from the Senate and House will meet in conference committee to negotiate a bill that is agreeable to both chambers and President Obama. Their task will be difficult due both to the significant differences between the bills, as well as the White House's concerns with both bills in their current forms.

The Senate passed its bill, the Every Child Achieves Act, on July 16 by a bipartisan vote of 81 to 17. Fourteen Republicans voted against it. They were joined by three Democrats, **Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Chris Murphy (D-CT), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)**.

“Last week, *Newsweek* magazine called this the ‘law that everyone wants to fix’—and today the Senate’s shown that not only is there broad consensus on the need to fix this law—remarkably, there’s also broad consensus on how to fix it,” [said Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions \(HELP\) Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander \(R-TN\)](#). “This is the consensus: continue the law’s important measurements of students’ academic progress but restore to states, school districts, classroom teachers, and parents the responsibility for deciding what to do about the results of those tests. On the Senate floor, we’ve ... passed a bill that says that the path to higher standards, better teaching, and real accountability is through the states and local communities, not Washington, DC. Now our job is to work with the House to produce a conference report that we can send to the president’s desk.”

In a [speech on the Senate floor](#) after the bill’s passage, **Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), top Democrat on the HELP Committee**, said that the Every Child Achieves Act was not the bill that she or Alexander would have written, but she called it a “strong bill that all sides can be proud of.” Murray also acknowledged that more work was needed on the bill, particularly to strengthen accountability and address inequality—two priorities that the White House has said must be addressed before the president will sign the bill.

The Senate had the opportunity to strengthen the bill’s accountability requirements during floor debate when it considered an amendment by Booker, Murphy, and Warren, as well as **U.S. Senators Chris Coons (D-DE), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)**. The amendment would have ensured that states were responsible for improving the lowest-performing schools, including the more than 1,200 high schools with high school graduation rates at or below 67 percent that enroll more than 1.1 million students. The amendment would have also ensured that these high schools were eligible for school

improvement grants while providing states, districts, and schools with the flexibility to implement evidence-based, comprehensive intervention. It also would have provided support to schools with large achievement gaps and to the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools. The amendment failed by a vote of 43 to 54.

In a [statement explaining his opposition to the Every Child Achieves Act](#), Booker said it did not “provide meaningful accountability measures that address the disparate achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color.” Booker added that the U.S. Congress “must pass legislation that provides support, access, and opportunity to equip the next generation to succeed, regardless of their socioeconomic status.”

In total, the Senate considered seventy-eight amendments during floor debate, of which sixty-five were adopted, including one by **Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)** and **Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)** that requires state plans to focus on the specific needs of middle and high schools.

Both the Senate bill and the House bill, the Student Success Act, eliminate NCLB’s accountability system and the requirement that schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), but neither bill replaces AYP with safeguards to ensure that traditionally underserved students receive the resources they need to succeed. Both bills also eliminate the requirements accompanying School Improvement Grants around the firing of teachers and principals and closing of schools, and neither bill includes a requirement for teacher evaluation or any minimum requirements for teachers, such as being “highly qualified.”

Among the differences, the House bill includes a provision referred to as “Title I Portability,” which allows Title I funds intended for schools with high poverty rates to instead be used in schools with lower concentrations of students from low-income families. The Senate voted against similar amendments during floor debate. Similarly, the House bill allows students to opt out of the assessments required under the law, but the Senate overwhelmingly rejected this proposal.

In the [July 16 episode of “Federal Flash,”](#) the Alliance for Excellent Education’s video series on important developments in education policy in Washington, DC, **Phillip Lovell, vice president for policy and advocacy**, explains that House Democrats, whose input was limited during consideration of the Student Success Act, could play a larger role in the House-Senate conference negotiations.



“The House passed its bill by the slimmest of margins,” Lovell said. “A number of Republicans voted against it because the bill wasn’t conservative enough. But in order for a bill to be signed

by the President, it must have a stronger federal role in education, meaning that the House can't pass a final bill by relying on Republican votes alone. They are going to have to secure some democratic votes."

Lovell predicted that **U.S. Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA)** will have "quite a bit of leverage" during negotiations. For his part, [Scott said in a statement](#) that the Every Child Achieves Act in its current form, "remains unworthy of the president's signature," noting that the bill "fails to require state and school district action to close persistent achievement gaps and graduate all students—regardless of race, income, disability, or language status—ready for college and career."

In his [statement on the Senate bill](#), **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** also stressed the importance of increased support for low-performing schools and students.

"The Every Child Achieves Act requires states to collect and report data on schools and provides extensive flexibility to states on how to respond, but it does not actually require states to act," Wise said. "Instead, it permits states to decide when, if, and where to intervene. That's like equipping the fire department with new tools and alarms, then letting it choose which fires to put out. ... Support for low-graduation-rate high schools and protections for these students must be included in this bill before it becomes law."



DOESN'T ADD UP: African American Students Less Likely to Complete Calculus and Other College-Level Courses in High School, According to New NCES Report

New data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) at the U.S. Department of Education reveals some startling discrepancies in the rates at which students from low-income families and students of color complete advanced-level math and science courses in high school.

Among students who were ninth graders in 2009, less than 6 percent of African American students and 10 percent of Latino students earned high school credit in calculus by the time they graduated in 2013, according to NCES. By contrast, more than 18 percent of white students and nearly 45 percent of Asian students completed the highest level math course. Similarly, only 6 percent of students in the lowest socioeconomic status quintile completed calculus during their high school years, compared to more than 31 percent of students in the highest quintile.

The findings are part of the *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09) 2013 Update and High School Transcript Study: A First Look at Fall 2009 Ninth-Graders in 2013*. The study tracks a nationally representative sample of public, charter, and private school students who were ninth graders in fall 2009 and focuses on students' progression through high school and into postsecondary education and employment, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. The study surveyed students during their freshman year of high school and then again during the spring of their junior year. This most recent report includes data collected during the summer and fall of 2013, the period immediately following the cohort's scheduled on-time graduation. High school graduation rates for the entire cohort and different subgroups of students within the cohort appear in the table below.

Student Subgroup	Received High School Diploma	Received GED or Other Equivalency	Enrolled in High School	Dropped Out of High School
African American	83.2%	4.5%	5.4%	6.9%
Asian	95.9%	1.3%	0.6%	2.2%
Latino	86.0%	2.4%	5.6%	6.0%
White	91.6%	2.5%	3.3%	2.7%
All Students	88.8%	2.8%	4.2%	4.2%

In addition to completing calculus at lower rates, African American students in the 2009 cohort were less likely to earn high school credits in Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, according to *HSLs:09*. Students who complete AP and IB courses in high school often earn college credit for their work as well, giving them an advantage toward completing their college degrees. While 23 percent of African American students earned some high school credits in AP or IB courses, only about 6 percent of African American students earned those credits in AP or IB math, while less than 8 percent earned those credits in AP or IB science courses. Latino students, meanwhile, had marginally higher rates; almost 34 percent of Latino students earned AP or IB credits, with almost 12 percent earning credits in math and 10 percent earning credits in science. By comparison, 72 percent of Asian students earned AP or IB credits during high school, with nearly 46 percent earning credits in math and 40 percent earning credits in science. Meanwhile, about 40 percent of white students earned AP or IB credits, with about 16 percent earning those credits in math or science.

Students from low-income families also completed AP and IB courses at lower rates, according to *HSLs:09*. Less than one-quarter of students in the lowest socioeconomic quintile earned AP or IB credits during high school and only about 6 percent earned those credits in either math or science. Meanwhile, 62 percent of students in the highest socioeconomic quintile earned AP or IB credits, with about 30 percent earning those credits in math or science.

These discrepancies are not entirely surprising considering that high schools with the highest concentrations of students living in poverty offer fewer advanced-level math and science courses, according to a [study conducted by the Center for Law and Social Policy \(CLASP\)](#). The CLASP study finds that only 41 percent of high-poverty high schools offer calculus, compared to 85 percent of low-poverty high schools—those where fewer than 25 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Such schools also predominantly and disproportionately serve students of color.

The [Alliance for Excellent Education found similar trends](#) when looking at the availability of rigorous courses in schools serving high concentrations of students of color. For example, among high schools with the highest enrollment of African American and Latino students, only 40 percent offered physics and 29 percent offered calculus, compared to 66 percent and 55 percent, respectively, of schools with the lowest enrollment of these students.

Furthermore, among the 2009 student cohort, African American students were less likely to earn high school credits through dual-enrollment options, programs in which students earn high school and college credits simultaneously for a course or series of courses, according to

HSLs:09. Only 5 percent of African American students and 7 percent of Latino students earned dual-enrollment credits during high school, compared to 11 percent of Asian students and nearly 12 percent of white students.

Meanwhile, students in the highest socioeconomic quintile were nearly three times more likely to complete dual-enrollment courses in high school than students in the lowest socioeconomic quintile, according to *HSLs:09*. Although states are expanding the availability of dual-enrollment options, many state and local funding structures still require students and their families to pay all or part of the tuition costs associated with dual-enrollment courses, creating financial barriers that prevent students from low-income families and students of color from participating in such programs, according to [an analysis by the Education Commission of the States \(ECS\)](#). This disparity in program participation puts students with the greatest needs at a distinct disadvantage since research shows that students who participate in dual-enrollment course work are more likely to graduate from high school, enter college, and complete college in less time than peers with similar high school academic performance and demographics.

High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09) 2013 Update and High School Transcript Study: A First Look at Fall 2009 Ninth-Graders in 2013 is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2015037>.



A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH: New Study Finds Dropping Out of High School Could Be as Deadly as Smoking

A wide body of [research](#) has established that high school dropouts face a variety of detrimental consequences, including lower earnings and higher rates of unemployment and incarceration. But a new study from the University of Colorado, New York University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill actually quantifies the number of deaths linked to the lack of a high school diploma.

“We know that the risk of death varies by education level, but a separate issue is what proportion of deaths can we relate to this,” explains **Virginia Chang, coauthor of the study and associate professor at New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and College of Global Public Health**. “We wanted to put a number on that, and we were surprised by how big the number is.”

For the study, *Mortality Attributable to Low Levels of Education in the United States*, Chang and her colleagues examined data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Census Bureau about more than 1 million people, analyzing the relative risk of death among individuals with various levels of education. The researchers then compared those findings with the actual distribution of educational attainment within the U.S. population to determine the number of deaths attributable to specific levels of education. Such “[e]stimates of attributable mortality [essentially] indicate the number of lives that could be potentially saved if adults had a higher level of education,” according to a statement released about the study.

The researchers estimate that the deaths of 145,243 individuals in the 2010 population could be attributed to those individuals’ lack of a high school diploma. This figure is “comparable to the

estimated number of deaths that could be averted if all current smokers had the mortality rates of former smokers,” according to the study. An additional 110,068 deaths could be saved if individuals who started college completed their bachelor’s degrees. Furthermore, the connection between level of education and mortality is so strong that “[e]xisting research suggests that a substantial part of the association between education and mortality is causal,” meaning efforts to increase high school and college graduation rates could impact adult death rates significantly and directly, according to the study.

“In addition to education policy’s obvious relevance for improving learning and socioeconomic opportunities, its benefits to health should also be thought of as a key rationale,” Chang says. “The bottom line is paying attention to education has the potential to substantively reduce mortality.”

Additionally, Chang and her colleagues examined data on people born in 1925, 1935, and 1945 to determine how education levels impact mortality over time. The study finds “the difference in life expectancy between different levels of education is bigger for the later birth cohorts,” Chang explains. This finding indicates that variations in mortality between different education levels are widening, and death rates are decreasing more rapidly for individuals with higher levels of education. In Chang’s study, the percentage of deaths attributable to low levels of education among people born in 1945 was double the percentage of similar deaths among people born in 1925. That means encouraging current high school dropouts to earn their diplomas potentially could save even more lives than in previous generations.

“Our results suggest that policies and interventions that improve educational attainment could substantially improve survival in the U.S. population, especially given widening educational disparities,” **Patrick Krueger, coauthor of the study and assistant professor at the University of Colorado, [says in a statement](#)**. “Unless these trends change, the mortality attributable to low education will continue to increase in the future.”

Mortality Attributable to Low Levels of Education in the United States is available at <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0131809#abstract0>.



**JUVENILE INCARCERATION, HUMAN CAPITAL, AND FUTURE CRIME:
Juvenile Incarceration Results in “Substantially Lower” High School Completion
Rates, According to Study**

Juvenile incarceration results in “substantially lower” high school completion rates and higher adult incarceration rates, according to a recent paper by **Joseph Doyle, Erwin H. Schell Professor of Management and professor of applied economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management**, and **Anna Aizer, associate professor of economics and public policy at Brown University**.

“Once incarcerated, a juvenile is unlikely to ever return to school, suggesting that even relatively short periods of incarceration can be very disruptive and have severe long-term consequences for this population,” the study notes. “Moreover, for those who do return to school, they are more likely to be classified as having a disability due to a social or behavioral disorder, likely reducing

the probability of graduation even among those who do return to school and possibly increasing the probability of future criminal behavior.”

The study, *Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly-Assigned Judges*, notes that United States spends \$6 billion annually on juvenile corrections. More than 130,000 juveniles are detained in the United States each year at an average annual direct cost of \$88,000.

Doyle and Aizer base their findings on a study of roughly 37,000 individuals in Chicago Public Schools who came before the juvenile justice court system between 1990 and 2006. They divide the group into two subgroups—the 29,000 individuals who were not incarcerated and the 8,500 who were. Of the incarcerated group, 77 percent were African American, 15 percent were Latino, and 7 percent were white.¹ Only 3 percent ultimately graduated from high school, compared to 12 percent of the non-incarcerated juvenile group. Nearly half (49 percent) of the incarcerated group were incarcerated again as an adult before turning twenty-five years old, compared to 28 percent of the non-incarcerated juvenile group.

The study offers several alternatives forms of punishment to incarceration, including electronic monitoring and well-enforced curfews, which “have the potential to increase high school graduation rates and reduce the likelihood of adult crime.” It also suggests policies that provide additional support and resources for juveniles upon their release. One policy that seems to work in the opposite direction is increased police presence in schools, which, Doyle and Aizer note, has led to an increase in juvenile arrests for “relatively mild infractions” and likely leads to an increase in juvenile detention and decreases in high school graduation rates.

Doyle and Aizer’s research comes on the heels of [*The School Discipline Consensus Report: Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged*](#), a 2014 report from the Council of State Governments Justice Center that offers a comprehensive plan for educators, health officials, law enforcement agencies, juvenile justice officials, and others on how to improve school climate and address student misbehavior while keeping students engaged and providing a safe learning environment for all.

Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly-Assigned Judges is available at <http://bit.ly/1fh8X3L>.

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; Kristen Loschert; 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).

¹ African Americans made up 55 percent of the student population in Chicago Public Schools during the study period, while Hispanic students made up 27 percent and white students made up 14 percent.