



Straight A's

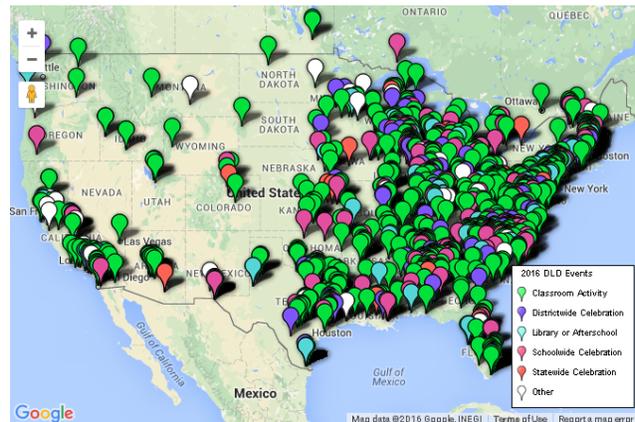
Public Education Policy And Progress



DIGITAL LEARNING DAY: Thousands of Teachers and Millions of Students Participate in Annual Event Demonstrating How Technology Can Improve Student Outcomes

On Wednesday, February 17, thousands of teachers and millions of students celebrated the fifth annual Digital Learning Day (DLDay) during more than 2,300 events across the nation. Created by the Alliance for Excellent Education in 2012, DLDay highlights great teaching and demonstrates how technology can improve student outcomes.

This year's DLDay had a special focus on digital equity, exploring how the digital divide is impacting communities and what national and local leaders, educators, and students are doing to minimize it.



“Teaching strategies that use technology to strengthen student learning (collectively known as digital learning) have become integral instructional practices in many schools,” wrote **Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise** in an [op-ed on Medium](#). “Yet a significant portion of the school-age population cannot access online learning tools after school hours. So this year’s DLDay emphasizes the need for greater digital equity and expanding digital learning opportunities for students, both inside and outside of school.”

From its [Washington, DC studio](#), the Alliance held six short webcasts on access, leadership, teacher preparation, college and career readiness, instructional quality, and the road ahead. **Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel** discussed the importance of student access to broadband internet within the home and the FCC’s plans to modernize the [Lifeline program](#). **Zac Chase, a ConnectED fellow of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Technology** provided an overview of the National Education Technology Plan, which, he said, “sets the vision for what education technology can be.” **Darryl Adams, superintendent of Coachella Valley Unified School District in California**, connected via Skype from a Wi-Fi-equipped school bus that the school district parks in neighborhoods with low-income families to provide students with internet access. Adams expressed his desire to do whatever it takes to get students connected, saying, “We’ll do

whatever it takes to educate. We'll put a router on a pigeon and fly it around the neighborhood if we have to.”

The Alliance also announced the winners of its Excellence and Innovation in Secondary Schools awards during DLDay. [Cleveland's MC² STEM High School](#), [Indiana's Warsaw Community Schools](#), and [California's Santa Ana Unified School District](#) were honored for successfully transforming the learning experience and improving outcomes for traditionally underserved secondary students. Additionally, forty-four school district teams were honored for completing steps 1-3 of the [Future Ready Dashboard](#), a free interactive planning tool that provides ongoing support to district and leadership teams who take the [Future Ready Schools Pledge](#).

Archived video from each of the Alliance's DLDay sessions is available "on demand" by clicking the links below:

- [Connecting Students Beyond School](#)
- [Creating a Culture of Equity and Innovation](#)
- [Improving the K-12 Teaching Pipeline](#)
- [Diversifying Students in STEM](#)
- [Transforming Teaching Through Technology](#)
- [The Road Ahead](#)

“Ensuring that every student is prepared for success in college, a career, and life is the ultimate goal that digital equity should serve,” Wise writes. “But the work for digital and educational equity does not end on Digital Learning Day. DLDay is just the beginning. Creating a system where all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, have access to high-quality digital learning opportunities requires the collective effort of policymakers, civil rights advocates, community activists, educators, and parents. The Alliance invites everyone to participate in the digital equity discussion and more importantly, to work together toward greater digital equity not just today but every day.”

Visit <http://www.twitter.com/officialDLDay> for a collection of the Alliance's favorite DLDay photos, videos, and messages from educators nationwide.



FULL SPEED AHEAD ON ESSA IMPLEMENTATION: Congress, U.S. Department of Education Hold Hearings on New Law as Acting Education Secretary John King Prepares for Busy Week on Capitol Hill

Although the Every Student Success Act (ESSA) was signed into law in December, replacing the No Child Left Behind Act, most of its provisions will not take effect until the 2017–18 school year. Still, that leaves little time for the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to issue regulations on how states and districts should implement ESSA in instances where the law as written leaves things open to interpretation.

If Republican congressional leaders have their way, ED will issue as little regulation as possible and instead largely defer to states and school districts. Democrats appreciate the greater flexibility ESSA affords states and school districts while wanting the federal government to continue to enforce the law's various safeguards for students of color, students from low-income families, and other traditionally underserved students.

All of these viewpoints were out in the open on February 10 when the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce's Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education held the first congressional hearing on implementation of ESSA. In a [blog post for the](#)

[Alliance for Excellent Education’s “High School Soup” blog](#), **Alliance Vice President of Policy and Advocacy Phillip Lovell** called the hearing a “stark reminder of the deep philosophical divide” between Republicans and Democrats on the federal role in education.

“Although both parties [supported] ESSA,” Lovell writes, “they are worlds apart on how to implement it. House Democrats want the U.S. Department of Education to hold states accountable for equity. House Republicans want to hold ED accountable for state flexibility.”

Subcommittee Chairman Todd Rokita (R-IL) underscored that point in his [opening statement](#), saying, “The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act puts states and school districts back in charge of education, and includes more than 50 pages of provisions to keep the Department of Education in check. ... Moving forward, it’s our collective responsibility to hold the Department of Education accountable for how it implements the law. Congress promised to restore state and local control over K–12 education, and now it’s our job to ensure that promise is kept.”

In her [opening statement](#), **U.S. Representative Marcia Fudge (D-OH)** highlighted the flexibility that the law grants to states in developing accountability systems, standards, and assessments, but she stressed that the law maintained federal protections for traditionally underserved students. She also underscored that the new flexibility states enjoy also comes with increased responsibility and said that states and school districts will need to “implement ESSA in a way that continues its focus on meeting the needs of our nation’s most at-risk students.”

Lovell notes that it is too early to tell how state accountability systems will balance equity and flexibility under ESSA, but he writes that education reform advocates need to “support state leaders who recognize the need for accountability systems to focus on equity,” while ED “needs to issue regulations that require states to maintain that focus.”

Already this year, ED has moved quickly on the regulations process. In January, it held two public meetings on ESSA—one in [Washington, DC](#) and one in [Los Angeles](#). On February 2, ED issued [guidance to states](#) on how federal dollars may be used to reduce unnecessary assessments and improve the quality of assessments. And on February 4, ED announced that it will undergo “negotiated rulemaking,” a process by which ED appoints people to serve on a committee to help develop regulations. Negotiated rulemaking makes it more likely that the regulation will be accepted by all interested parties, but it makes consensus more difficult to achieve. Negotiators will meet up to three times by the end of April, and if consensus is reached, ED will issue the agreed-upon regulations regarding assessments and the Title I “supplement, not supplant” policy for public comment.

Nominated by President Obama to Serve as U.S. Secretary of Education, John King Facing Busy Week on Capitol Hill

One person who will play a key role throughout the ESSA implementation process is **Acting U.S. Secretary of Education John King**. After originally saying that he would not nominate King to serve as secretary, President Obama [reversed course on February 11](#) and said he would nominate King. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee will consider King’s nomination during an [executive session on February 25](#).

The day before, on February 24, King will testify at a House Education and the Workforce Committee hearing on “[Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education](#).” The following day, February 25, King will again appear before the House Education and the Workforce Committee, this time for a hearing titled, “[Next Steps for K–12 Education: Upholding the Letter and Intent of the Every Student Succeeds Act](#).”

Alliance for Excellent Education President Bob Wise is one of many who believes that King can handle the political heat.

“At his heart, Dr. King is a passionate advocate for kids,” Wise said in a [statement supporting King’s nomination](#). “He knows what it is like to need an advocate, having lost both of his parents at age twelve. He also knows how important an individual teacher can be, having been personally uplifted by the too-often-overlooked educators who dedicate their lives to teaching the nation’s students.

“His dedicated heart comes to this new position encased in a body bearing numerous battle scars. Dr. King’s previous experience as commissioner of education for the state of New York will serve him well in the legislative wrestling ring that has been made of the nation’s capital. He knows the fault lines in the fast-moving education policy environment.”



COLLEGE MAJORS AND EARNINGS: New Report Finds African Americans Underrepresented in High-Earning College Majors

African Americans are concentrated in majors with the lowest income potential, according to a study from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Moreover, African Americans are underrepresented in college majors associated with the fastest-growing and highest-paying careers—science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields; health; and business, according to the report.

“The college major, which has critical economic consequences throughout life, reflects personal choices but also reflects the fact that African American students are concentrated in open-access four-year institutions where students have limited choices of majors offered,” according to the report, *African Americans: College Majors and Earnings*.

African Americans who majored in pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences and administration have the highest average earnings of any specific major—\$84,000 per year, the report says. But African Americans account for only 6 percent of all degree holders in this health major, the report says. By contrast, African Americans account for 21 percent of health and medical administrative services majors—the lowest-paying health major averaging just \$46,000 per year.

Meanwhile, African Americans who majored in civil, computer, mechanical, electrical, chemical, or industrial and manufacturing engineering earn between \$68,000 and \$76,000 per year. Yet African Americans account for only 3–6 percent of all degree holders in these engineering fields, which are among the top ten highest earning majors, the report says. By contrast, African Americans represent 10 percent of early childhood education majors and 20

percent of human services and community organization majors, the two lowest earning majors at \$38,000 and \$39,000 per year respectively. In fact, the “10 [sic] detailed majors with the highest percentage of African Americans ... consist entirely of majors associated with earnings lower than \$65,000” per year, as the table from the report shows below. The Georgetown report examines the average earnings and representation of African Americans in 137 specific majors grouped into fifteen general categories.

In general, African Americans disproportionately major in “intellectual and caring professions,” fields where low incomes do not necessarily reflect years of higher education, the Georgetown report says.

African Americans tend to be overrepresented in low-earning majors, ranked by percentage of African Americans (with median earnings)

	Percentage African American	Median Earnings*
Health and Medical Administration Services	21%	\$46,000
Human Services and Community Organization	20%	\$39,000
Social Work	19%	\$41,000
Public Administration	17%	\$52,000
Criminal Justice and Fire Protection	15%	\$48,000
Sociology	14%	\$44,000
Computer and Information Systems	14%	\$63,000
Human Resources and Personnel Management	14%	\$51,000
Interdisciplinary Social Sciences	13%	\$44,000
Pre-Law and Legal Studies	13%	\$46,000

Bachelor's degree holders refer to adults between the ages of 21 and 59 with a Bachelor's degree but no graduate degree. Earnings data are reported for workers employed full-time, full-year. Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey microdata, 2010-2014.
* Earnings at the 50th percentile, ages 25-59

“The low-paying majors that African Americans are concentrated in are of high social value but low economic value,” says **Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce and coauthor of the report.**

Although the report acknowledges that personal choice contributes to such career differences, since students select their own fields of study, it stresses that “[c]areful career planning is especially crucial for African American students to help them avoid debt and underemployment later in life.”

A [2015 case study](#) from the Alliance for Excellent Education on Xavier University of Louisiana’s summer bridge program for middle and high school students notes that “students of color aspire to major in STEM in college at the same rates as their white and Asian American peers.” At the same time, however, factors beyond personal choice—such as fewer opportunities to take [advanced math and science course work](#) in high school—may prevent students of color from pursuing those goals.

African Americans: College Majors and Earnings is available at <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/african-american-majors/>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: Governors Recognize Education as Bridge to Strong Workforce

Throughout the 2016 state of the state addresses, the issue of a strong and prepared workforce has taken priority in many of the governors’ speeches. Governors are increasingly looking to form pathways between education and careers to foster more skilled and prepared workers. These state of the state addresses highlight several programs underway to achieve this goal.

New Hampshire: Gov. Maggie Hassan Looks to K–12 to Strengthen Workforce

In her [February 4 state of the state address](#), **New Hampshire Gov. Maggie Hassan (D)** emphasized the importance of fostering a strong workforce, something that “begins with a strong education at all levels—from early childhood, to our K–12 system, to higher education.”

Hassan explained that businesses across the state say a “highly educated workforce remains their number-one need.” Preparing students at the K–12 level for higher education and the challenges of the changing economy is necessary to make this goal achievable, Hassan said. She named several efforts underway, including increasing math requirements, creating new options for math classes, developing stronger science standards, and integrating coding into the curriculum to have a twenty-first-century education.

In addition to work in the K12 area, Hassan also announced a new plan, Gateway to Work, to “strengthen job training, create new apprenticeship opportunities, help remove the barriers that cause too many of our citizens to fail in the workplace, and help our young people get a leg up on their futures.” As a part of this plan, partnerships will be formed between community colleges and the business community to establish apprenticeship programs in high-need career areas, including manufacturing, information technology networking, and health care.

During her speech, Hassan also nodded to the Performance Assessment for Competency Education (PACE) pilot program, a competency-based education model used in seven school districts and one charter school across the state. Through the program, participating districts administer the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium’s (SBAC’s) statewide test once in elementary school, one in middle school, and once in high school—three grades instead of seven. In the years when students do not take the SBAC assessment, districts administer a local performance assessment developed by the districts and validated by the state. Locally managed assessments are integrated into students’ work and reduce the level of standardized testing, a model, Hassan notes, that is expanding nationally due to its success.

A 2013 report from the Alliance for Excellent Education, [Strengthening High School Teaching and Learning in New Hampshire’s Competency-Based System](#), profiles how two New Hampshire high schools made the shift to competency-based learning in which students advance when they have mastered course content rather than the number of days students spend in class.

Wisconsin: Gov. Scott Walker Praises Efforts to Prepare Students for Careers

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R) focused on education as the bridge to prepare citizens for the workforce during his [January 19 state of the state address](#). He mentioned several ways Wisconsin is working to prepare students for a career, including helping technical colleges enroll 5,000 more students into high-demand career programs, and doubling the number of youth apprenticeships.

Walker also discussed the [Academic and Career Planning](#) pilot program, which will give access to a career plan to children in grades six through twelve in twenty-five school districts, enabling

them to explore their interests and take relevant courses to prepare them for their futures. He announced an additional \$3 million in funding for the Wisconsin Fast Forward program, which enables districts to partner with technical colleges to start students on career plans through dual-enrollment programs that allow students to earn college credits while still in high school. And a new three-year degree would allow students to begin during high school and finish at University of Wisconsin, reducing costs and getting students into the workforce sooner.

Walker praised these efforts, noting that well-paying careers can require more than a high school diploma, making training and higher education options critical to meet today's workforce needs. He also called for a change in perspective about students' career choices, saying, "We must value our students who choose to be highly skilled welders, IT technicians, or certified nursing assistants as much as we do those who choose to be doctors or lawyers. Each of these professions is vitally needed for a strong economy in Wisconsin."

Walker shared positive news of Wisconsin's high school graduation rates reaching third best in the country, and the graduating class of 2015 having the second highest ACT scores in the country. He also noted that the class of 2016 will be given the opportunity to take the ACT for free as an effort to overcome financial barriers and close achievement gaps.

He also emphasized that technology drives success, creating a need for high-speed internet connections. Walker noted that his budget tripled the amount of funding dedicated to broadband access across the state, which will assist rural areas, small businesses, and public schools in getting connected.

Tennessee: Gov. Bill Haslam Emphasizes Benefits of a More Educated Population

During his [February 1 state of the state address](#), **Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam (R)** focused on the improvement in student outcomes as a result of strategic investments, increased accountability, and higher standards. Markers of this progress include thousands more students on grade-level math and science, improved ACT scores, and a continually increasing high school graduation rate, which now stands at 88 percent.

Haslam explained that the importance of preparing students for success after high school, saying that "investing in education is the smartest thing we can do for economic development ... The facts are clear: a more educated population will spend less money on health care. Less money on incarceration. If we're going to be about anything, it has to be about opportunity for all Tennessee 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; Kristen Loschert; Caroline Waldman; 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).