

Adolescent Literacy Policy Update

More than eight million children in America in grades four through twelve read at “below basic” levels, according to results from the most recent National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test. Both the President and Members of Congress have responded to this national problem by proposing new federal programs focused on helping older children improve their literacy skills. Below is a summary of what the President has proposed in his Fiscal Year 2005 budget as well as two of the most comprehensive initiatives introduced in Congress promoting adolescent literacy and effective reading interventions for secondary school students at risk of failure.

President Bush’s Proposed Fiscal Year 2005 Budget

In the President’s State of the Union address in January, he proposed *Jobs for the 21st Century*, a new program designed to boost job skills by improving high school and postsecondary education. This program, as presented in the Fiscal Year 2005 budget, is the Administration’s response to addressing the needs of older students who are “striving readers” succeed in school, take rigorous high school courses and graduate prepared for college.

Jobs for the 21st Century – Striving Readers Initiative

Jobs for the 21st Century proposes \$333 million in new federal funding for education and job training programs. It contains six new initiatives: Striving Readers, Math and Science Partnerships, Advanced Placement, Adjunct Teachers Corps and Enhanced Pell Grants. The Striving Readers Initiative focuses specifically on improving the literacy levels of middle and high school students who are currently struggling in school. This new \$100 million program initiative would make competitive grants available to develop, implement and evaluate effective reading instruction for secondary students reading significantly below grade level. The Striving Readers Initiative would provide funds to approximately 50 to 100 school districts to implement demonstration programs that have proved effective in raising students’ reading achievement. This program helps to strengthen and expand the Reading First program by adding an adolescent literacy component.

Legislative Initiatives

Two pieces of legislation that specifically address adolescent literacy have been introduced in Congress. One, S. 1554, the Pathways for All Students to Succeed (PASS) Act was introduced in the Senate by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) in August 2003. The other, H.R. 3085, the Graduation for All Act, was introduced in the House of Representatives by Representatives Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX) and Susan Davis (D-CA) in October 2003.

Pathways for All Students to Succeed (PASS) Act, S. 1554

In an effort to address the nation’s staggering high school dropout rate, and to focus the attention of policymakers on the need for reform in the middle and high school arena, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) introduced the PASS Act. The \$3.5 billion bill is made up of three titles: Title I

– Reading for Success, Title II – Pathways to Success and Title III – Fostering Successful Secondary Schools.

Program Description

Title I – Reading for Success

Building on the success of the Reading First program, this Title will create “Reading to Succeed,” a \$1 billion grant program to establish effective, research-based reading and writing programs for students in grades 6 through 12, including limited English proficient children and children with disabilities.

Grants will provide resources for secondary schools to hire literacy coaches (at least one per 20 teachers), who will help teachers incorporate research-based literacy instruction into their mathematics, science, history, civics, geography, literature, language arts, and other core academic courses. Literacy coaches will help teachers identify students who need additional reading instruction, assess those students to determine their needs and coordinate services to ensure students receive the services they need. They will also work with teachers to institute curricula that strengthen the reading and writing skills of all students. In addition to hiring literacy coaches, funds can be used to provide relevant professional development for literacy coaches and teachers, strengthen reading and writing curricula in middle and secondary schools, and implement diagnostic assessments, research-based curricula, instructional materials and interventions in secondary schools.

Title II – Pathways to Success

Title II creates grants to provide academic and career counseling, cultivate parent engagement and coordinate support services for at-risk high school students across the country. It provides \$2 billion to support the hiring and placement of Academic Counselors (at a rate of no less than one Academic Counselor to 150 students). These individuals will work directly with students, parents and teachers to develop six-year plans outlining the path each student in a high-need school will take to reach his or her goals. Academic Counselors will also coordinate new and existing resources (including other federal programs such as Title I, GEAR Up, TRIO, Dropout Prevention, Advance Placement Incentive Program Grants and Perkins Vocational Education) to ensure that students receive the services identified in their plans and facilitate a smooth transition to college or a career. Participating schools may hire a qualified individual to serve as an Academic Counselor, or may re-designate an existing professional provided that the professional is fully qualified and that the re-designation does not result in a reduction of services to students or a supplantation of current funding.

Title III – Fostering Successful Secondary Schools

Title III of the PASS Act will help educators turn around low-performing schools to ensure that every teenager is learning in a successful environment. This \$500 million grant program will allow districts to develop - or identify and implement - reforms that turn around low-performing schools and improve student achievement. For example, under Title III, districts can use funds to implement one of the most successful high school improvement strategies- reducing the size of the high school learning environment by creating smaller schools or academies within larger schools. Districts can also use the funds to implement comprehensive school reform models that have demonstrated success in raising student achievement. Working with universities, nonprofit

organizations, and research institutions, schools can adapt promising reform models to meet their needs. Districts receiving grant funds will be required to have a rigorous outside evaluation of the success of their high school reforms, and the results of these evaluations will be used to help other challenged high schools improve.

Current Status

Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA) Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Tom Daschle (D-SD) have cosponsored the PASS Act, and it has been referred to the Senate Health, Labor and Pensions Committee. Due to the Republican majority and the current fiscal climate, it is unlikely that the bill will move during this session of Congress.

The Graduation for All Act, H.R. 3085

Focusing on the alarmingly low graduation rates in the nation's high schools, the Graduation for All Act would provide \$1 billion in federal funding for schools to place literacy coaches in high schools and implement individualized graduation plans for students most at-risk of dropping out of high school. Funding would be specifically targeted at schools with the lowest graduation rates and would provide funding for at least one literacy coach for every high-needs middle and high school. These coaches will help teachers incorporate research-based literacy instruction into their mathematics, science, history, civics, geography, literature, language arts, and other core academic courses.

Current Status

The bill currently has 45 Democratic co-sponsors. It has been referred to the House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Education Reform. Similar to the situation of the PASS Act, the Republican majority and the current fiscal climate make it unlikely that the bill will move during this session of Congress.