

President Bush Proposes \$1.5 Billion Initiative for Secondary Reforms to Help High Schoolers Succeed

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SPECIAL REPORT*

*Prepared by:
Education TURNKEY Systems, Inc.
256 North Washington Street
Falls Church, Virginia 22046-4549
(703) 536-2310 / (703) 536-3225 FAX*

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On January 12, 2005, at a "newly turned-around" high school in Falls Church, Virginia, President Bush, accompanied by Secretary of Education designee, Margaret Spellings, outlined the components of a \$1.5 billion initiative, which according to USED would "expand NCLB into high schools." According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, which is perhaps the leading national secondary reform coalition, about \$1.2 billion would be reallocated from existing programs as well as new funding for "high school interventions such as reading help for struggling high school students and an early intervention program that would help incoming ninth grade students who are at risk of falling behind." In some respects, the initiative President Bush outlined is similar to the Administration's proposal last year reflected in their proposed FY 2005 budget, which was rejected for the most part by Congress; but, in many respects, it goes beyond the earlier proposal. Below, we outline the components announced by the President with relevant comparisons to the proposal last year.

Individual Performance Plans for Struggling Eighth Grade Students

As the President stated, under this plan, high school teachers will analyze eighth grade test data for incoming ninth grade students so that, when they see that a student is at risk of falling behind, the teachers and the parents can get together and design a program to help make sure that each child can catch up before it is too late. It is not clear whether state eighth grade assessment results or whether district "end of course" or "exit exams" test results would be the basis for developing the individual performance plan for at-risk students. This component appears to resemble the early intervention model being implemented under Reading First and the new, prereferral interventions under IDEA for borderline students who must be provided scientifically-based interventions prior to being placed in special education programs. It appears that the "performance plan" would be very similar to individual education programs (IEPs) developed for students who are placed in special education programs in consultation with parents and the student's IEP team teachers. This initiative was not included in the FY 2004 budget proposal, although, in some respects, it is similar to the "striving readers initiative" which was also proposed last year. USED indicated that approximately \$200

million, some which is likely to be new funds, would be used to implement this initiative.

Increased Math and Reading Testing in Grades 9, 10, and 11

The Bush plan would expand testing to at least two more grade levels beyond current NCLB requirements (e.g., only one grade level in grades 9-12 need be tested under the current NCLB). Approximately \$250 million would be provided to states to develop and administer these secondary level tests, compared to approximately \$400 million so allocated in 2002 and each year thereafter to states to implement required state assessments in grades 3-8. Only a limited number of states currently test students at each grade level through grade 11. To support the overall initiative, which is designed to measure the degree to which the interventions are increasing student performance, the Administration will likely propose to reallocate a significant amount of funds, perhaps one-third of the overall initiative, from a number of existing program. In his speech, he pointed to existing Federal programs that sometimes operate as independent "silos" such as vocational education, college preparation, or programs to restructure schools. Prime candidates for funds reallocation to these new proposed initiatives would be technical and vocational education (i.e., Perkins Act), which last year's budget referred to as "outdated relics suitable for classroom realities of the 1950s instead of a dynamic academic rigorous component of the 21st Century high school." In fact, last year, the President proposed major changes in the reauthorization of the Perkins Career and Technical Education program. However, resistance in Congress to such changes halted the reauthorization process. Another program currently funded at about \$230 million that could be a target for reallocation would be the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program whose initial sponsor in 1997 was Chairman David Obey, then Chairman of the House Education Appropriations Subcommittee; CSRD rescissions had been proposed by the Bush Administration and will likely be proposed once again in the proposed FY 2006 budget scheduled to be released on February 7.

Striving Readers Initiative

The new Striving Readers competitive grant program, proposed by the President at a level of \$100 million last year ended up receiving only \$25 million for this coming year. The President's request for next year is likely to be \$200 million. Under the President's proposal last year and the initiative for which Congress appropriated \$25 million for this current year, the main purpose would be to "develop and implement research-based interventions that will improve the reading skills of high school students who read below grade level" (President's proposed FY 2005 budget). However, in his most recent speech, the President stated that "We'll use these resources (\$200 million) to help more than 100 school districts train teachers in research-based methods so they can provide effective interventions for middle and high school students struggling in reading." If one takes the President's statement literally, the "interventions" would be more focused on teacher training and professional development rather than on the validation of existing scientifically-based interventions. The Conference Report to the 2005 Appropriations Act urges the Secretary to fund the development and evaluation of reading interventions for both middle and high school students and to give priority to those grantees who agree to participate in randomized trial research studies.

High School Mathematics Improvement Component

The President has proposed a \$120 million initiative... "to train math teachers in methods proven to succeed. Every student should be prepared in math so that every graduate has the skills necessary to succeed." In his "Strengthening Math Skills" proposal (but not passed) last year, the two separate components of the Math/Science Partnership program which have been operated by the National Science Foundation and USED would have been unified within the Department of Education. The proposed total last year of \$269 million would have been used to improve classroom instruction and accelerate learning and math for struggling students. This recent proposed component would be part of the Math and Science Partnership program but operated separately by USED; the \$120 million component would come from the proposed \$269 million budget. Not unexpectedly, the National Science Foundation and its mostly university-based grantees, have fought the President's proposal vehemently; only about \$80 million would remain in the NSF-operated MSP program. .

While the Bush proposal also calls for increased funding for the Math and Science Partnership program from \$179 million to \$269 million, the question is whether the USED portion will experience a change in direction. One direction could be the validation of middle school and high school mathematics interventions. The What Works Clearinghouse, during its last round of reports, only found two interventions that were proven to be effective based upon scientifically-based research studies that were submitted to WWC.

Other components of the secondary reform initiative include the following:

- expansion of the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement (AP programs) to \$52 million in FY 2006 representing a 73 percent increase;
- assistance to states to develop/expand a "state scholars" program that encourages students to take rigorous courses, which will be funded at \$45 million;
- an additional \$1,000 for Pell grants paid during the first two years of college for low-income students who successfully complete the state scholars curriculum.

Several components are also directed to teachers, including:

- funding of an Adjunct Teachers Corps which would provide opportunities for nonteacher professionals to teach middle and high school courses, especially in math and science;
- Presidential support for the Crayola Credit bill submitted by Congress which would reimburse teachers for up to \$250 of out-of-pocket classroom expenses;
- a new \$500 million incentive fund to reward teachers who "get results" or volunteer to teach in low-income schools.

During the January 12 speech, the President also appeared to rule out some other proposed changes that had been recommended by pro-NCLB groups, such as the Thomas Fordham Foundation which recommended the national use of NAEP in lieu of various state assessments to ensure greater uniformity and comparability. Recent studies have shown that the reported number of students meeting proficiency levels in math and reading in certain grade levels, according to state assessments, have no relationship whatsoever to state scores on the NAEP math and reading assessments. As the President noted on one occasion, "...we're closing the gap. And you know how we know, is because we measure, because we're willing to devise measurement systems, not at the Federal level, but at the state level."

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For all of his proposed interventions, the President stressed that "states will receive the flexibility to choose which programs will be most effective in serving the needs of their high school students."