



The 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District's  
Santa Cruz County Student Advisory Board

## Education Policy

2010-2011 Annual Report

Saturday, June 7, 2011

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## ***Introduction***

*Brittany L. Whitehill*

*Nettie Mitchell-Brudnick*

The Student Advisory Board was started by Representative Anna Eshoo in order to give students the opportunity to play a role in political activism and gain experience in the field of policy-making and legislation. This unique, exemplary program created by Congresswoman Eshoo, allows students to voice their opinions, while having a direct and meaningful impact on United States policy. Often, young adults feel that they are robbed of the opportunity to affect decisions made at the national level; however, the Student Advisory Board empowers youth to express concerns with the state of our nation, and provide insightful solutions to these concerns.

Granted with this opportunity, we were compelled to select education policy as the overarching topic of our research. As public school students, the health of our state's education system and its relevant federal policies are of vital importance to us. We witness first hand both the strengths and flaws of education policy in California and nationwide, thus we feel both obliged and enthused to contribute to its evolution and improvement.

The individual presentations of this year's Student Advisory Board span pressing issues from student nutrition, to learning disabilities, to teacher unionization to the *DREAM Act*. Each student took a creative approach to his or her topic of research and produced thoughtful and inspired solutions, which we believe, collectively, could drastically better education in the United States.

We are confident that you will be impressed and motivated by the phenomenal work of the 2010-2011 Student Advisory Board, none of which would have been possible without the without the dedication of our mentor and guide, Christine Padilla, to whom we owe our deepest gratitude.

We would like to transition into this evening's inspiring presentations with a quote. As the former, world-changing president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, once stated, "*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*" *We take this quote to heart, and with knowledge that education can truly inspire and empower societal progress on the local, national, and global levels.*

## ***Educating Students with Learning Disabilities***

*Lara Isaacson*

### **Introduction:**

In the current political sector of the United States, many issues are being scrutinized and many issues are surfacing, including topics such as health-care, No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, tax cuts, and unemployment. A broad range of concerns are up for discussion.

Unfortunately, I see a couple issues, that may seem minor on the surface, that are not amongst the issues being addressed on the House of Senate floors in Washington. First of all, let me say that I am dyslexic. Additionally, my two siblings each have Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD or more commonly ADD). Therefore, I am very familiar with this topic and sympathetic to the plight of people with mild to moderate learning disabilities, like myself.

I have not let my dyslexia stop me but it has been an uphill battle all the way through my schooling. Also, my case is mild and my family is supportive of me and my siblings. Others, however, are not so fortunate.

I do not believe that people in politics are unsympathetic to people with learning disabilities at all. I simply think that unless they know a close relative or friend with a learning disability, they would not necessarily know certain things about their plight. Especially with the great pieces of legislation for people with learning and other disabilities, such as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (which is Federal Law) and the 504 section of the Rehabilitation Act (for California), many people think that the disabled are completely taken care of. On the contrary, I have found a few major flaws in the system, flaws that can be fixed but need to be addressed nonetheless.

### **Issues:**

1. The problems I refer to with these wonderful pieces of legislation, actually come before a person is diagnosed with any disability. First of all, if someone is not diagnosed with a disability, these pieces of legislation do not help him or her at all. This rule appear to be only reasonable until one discovers just how much the testing for learning disabilities cost. The testing for one child with ADD in Santa Cruz County is \$3,600. (Isaacson) It can already be very clear that a child has a learning disability, but before any official help can be offered by schools, there must be an official diagnosis. That is an especially difficult cost to bare when one discovers that diagnostic testing is not financially covered by school, the government, or health insurance companies. Insurance companies do not cover testing for educational purposes; however, that is the main need for a person with a learning disability. Furthermore, some companies state that the testing is too experimental, making it not the necessarily the best option for people with learning disabilities, to justify not paying for the testing. (Cigna) This entirely discounts the fact that students cannot receive help for their disability without the testing. Also, there are many resources for helping people with disabilities; there are websites and books. The large numbers for people who know about dyslexia appear to have a consensus on basic things that can be done for people with learning disabilities. Calling testing and treatment experimental gives the impression that these are new diagnoses that have not been studies or researched well. The bottom line is that insurance companies will not pay for diagnostic testing and the government currently does not either.

What does that mean for families who believe their children have learning disabilities? If the family has the money, the child can get tested, get the little extra help they need, and have a fairly normal school life. If the family cannot afford the testing, the child will have to go through school with no help at all, save for a sympathetic teacher who secretly gives the student an extra day for a big assignment. Most teachers however would not even know that a student has a learning disability such as Dyslexia or ADD. This was the case with me.

I spent most of my years in school struggling with reading and math with a majority of my teachers never knowing about my dyslexia. I understood concepts in my classes sufficiently, but reading is a part of everything and math is a huge part of education. When letters switch around in a word, numbers exchange places in a problem, or whole words have tendency to change places with each other, reading and copying basic things can be quite a challenge, to say the least. Those are the types of things a dyslexic person sees while doing any sort of numerical task or a task which requires reading. To a dyslexic person letters are like any other object, the same at any angle. Dyslexia is not related to vision or intelligence; it is merely a different way the brain processes visual information. (Dyslexic Symptoms) A table is still a table from two different sides of a room, so why is a nine not a six? Obviously, this creates problems with learning in school, where a large portion of learning is done by reading and numbers. If my family had the money to get my dyslexia officially diagnosed, I would be able to take more time on tests and other assignments which is not a huge advantage, but would have made my Kindergarten through twelfth grade years of school more manageable. For many students with mild to moderate learning disabilities, a bit more time is all that they need. The pressure of time makes things infinitely harder for someone who has a learning disability. If they can learn a greater quantity and learn with more ease given more time; is it not reasonable, therefore, a society's responsibility to give it to them?

Furthermore, diagnostic testing is especially important for young children who can be greatly helped by simple techniques if it is known they have a learning disability. If the signs are seen early on, a child will not have to fall behind other students, feeling inadequate or unintelligent as I did through much of my schooling. College level diagnostic testing is often covered by schools, yet by that point in a student's education, it is often too late for many students. Testing at that level most likely only helps a small amount of students who were able to make it that far on their own. Such students probably have less severe cases such as myself.

If students do not get help they need, they could end up giving up on themselves and finding less productive things to do with their time, trying to make up for the insecurities that accompany feeling unable to do well in school. A study done by the National Center on Education, Disability, and Juvenile Justice showed that 35.6% of youth in Juvenile Hall have learning disabilities which is more than double the percentage of youth not in Juvenile Hall who have learning disabilities. (Burrell) I do not say this to create a negative stigma against people with learning disabilities, but rather to call attention to an issue which often goes overlooked and can affect the entire nation.

**2.** The second major problem surrounding the current system for aiding those with learning disabilities involves teachers. Teachers do not necessarily know much about disabilities, such as Dyslexia and ADD. If they have no training on the subjects, how can they properly teach them. Most of my teachers never knew, especially since I did my work and understood concepts, that I am dyslexic. They only knew I struggled with reading and math. That is not to say they were in

any way incompetent or that they did not suspect something, but what legally could they do without an official diagnosis? Nothing. Without training to recognize the signs of learning disabilities or the skills to aid those who have them, teachers are at a loss. Some teachers may even think students are simply lazy, unintelligent, unusually slow. Without training or knowledge, teachers would have no reason to think otherwise.

Some would say that all students with learning disabilities belong in Special Education and that normal teachers should not have to deal with such students. However, students with mild Dyslexia and ADD should not be treated as if they are unable to learn in a normal classroom setting. I, for example, have competed almost twelve years in a normal classroom setting. I had to work much harder at reading and arithmetic than most other students, but I managed to push through. Dyslexia did not effect my intelligence, only my ability to learn certain ways or learn as swiftly as others. I was at a disadvantage, but does that mean I should have been put in lower level classes? My siblings are also each some of the brightest students in their classrooms, and teachers really like having them in their classes. Putting students like my siblings and myself in Special Education classes would be degrading, would prevent them from reaching their full potential, and would be unfair to other students who do need one-on-one attention constantly. Students with Dyslexia and ADD can often learn in a normal environment; they simply need a bit of extra support from teachers, staff, and parents. Learning disabilities are not a reflection of intelligence; they are simply a way of defining a person's specific inability to complete certain tasks or utilize specific skills. (Learning Disabilities)

Others may wonder just how many people are affected by learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, and whether these issues are worth addressing with such persistence. In the United States alone, approximately fifteen to twenty percent of people have dyslexia. (Understanding Dyslexia) Additionally, approximately four to six percent of all children in public schools in the united states have a Specific Learning Disability. (For Teachers) Those numbers are likely only including people/ children who are diagnosed. Learning Disabilities make a big impact on student which mean, we need to do everything we can to ensure that they do not prevent students from reaching their full potential.

### **Proposal:**

As I mentioned earlier, learning disabilities in the sense I have discussed is not a topic on the House or Senate floors of congress currently. Therefore the solutions I propose are my own bills. The first bill I have drafted addresses the issues of diagnostic testing for students with the possibility of having Dyslexia, ADD, or other learning disabilities. It would require the government to fund the diagnostic testing if both the teacher and a parent of a students found reason to believe a student has a learning disability. The second bill would require all public schools to hold educational days (during paid teacher development time) to help teachers learn to recognize the signs of ADD and Dyslexia as well as acquire tips for helping children with these learning disabilities succeed. Schools would also be required to offer information in learning disabilities to parents and guardians of students. The teacher's training is particularly important to the first bill because teachers must recommend (along with parents) that the student be tested which means they must first know how to recognize the signs of learning disabilities. Then, of course the teachers would also have the skills to aid the students with learning disabilities on a very practical level. If both of these proposed pieces of legislation could be made into law, I believe, all students with learning disabilities would finally have the full opportunity to learn.

## **Conclusion:**

All students deserve the opportunity to succeed. IDEA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act are incredible and extremely helpful pieces of legislation but people cannot be helped by them if they cannot get diagnosed. Without the spread of knowledge and training among teachers, many children and parents will not even know there is a problem that needs addressing. Without money, families will be unable to afford to allocate the testing required to get help for their children. In the United States we do not only let rich children get a proper education. Financially disadvantaged children with Dyslexia and ADD deserve an equal opportunity to learn as those who can. The current system is unacceptable. I do not blame anyone for these oversights; I believe these gaps in the education system of children with learning disabilities are simply dilemmas which have gone unnoticed by the public eye and legislators. (How could anyone know, unless they were told or experienced them?) This is why I am asking you, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, to take my bills to congress: to raise awareness and to make a difference in the lives of people who have learning disabilities on a national scale.

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*Educating Students with Learning Disabilities*

112th CONGRESS

1st Session

**H. R.**

To aid and support students with learning disabilities.

**IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**June 7, 2011**

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**A Bill**

To aid and support students with learning disabilities.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

**SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the 'ESWLD'.

**SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

In this Act:

(1) LEARNING DISABILITY- The term 'learning disability' refers to any disorder that interferes with a student's ability to learn or utilize language skills or academic skills (including but not limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic).

(A) 'Learning disability' includes but is not limited to Dyslexia, and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.

(2) DYSLEXIA- The term 'Dyslexia' refers to the disorder resulting in an impaired ability to interpret spatial relationships especially with language and number skills.

(3) ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE DISORDER- The term 'Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder' refers to the disorder characterized by inability by hyperactivity and impulsive and distracted/inattentive behavior.

(A) Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder may also be cited in this Bill as "ADHD."

(3) SECRETARY- The term 'Secretary' refers to the Secretary of Education.

(4) ELIGIBLE STUDENTS- The term 'eligible students' refers to a student who attends at a public school of the United States of America, under eighteen years of age, who

qualify, as determined by the Secretary, by demonstrating written proof of meeting the following requirements:

(A) One or more of the legal parents or guardians of the student in question must have reason to believe the Student in question has a learning disability and approve of the testing.

(B) One or more of the current public school teachers of the school the student is attending must have reason to believe the student in question has a learning disability.

(C) There must be proof of research on the topic of diagnostic testing for as learning disability including discovering and presenting the cost of the testing in addition to reading or listening to information about the learning disability in question.

(4) INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT- The term 'Individuals with Disabilities Education Act' refers to the federal legislation enacted in 1975 and amended in 2004.

(A) 'Individuals with Disabilities Education Act' may also be cited in this bill as 'IDEA.'

### **SEC. 3. PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.**

The Secretary is authorized to award federal grants up to the amount determined by research of diagnostic testing, for the learning disability in question, near the home of the the student in question, to all eligible students' legal parents or guardians.

### **SEC. 4. APPLICATIONS.**

Eligible students' legal parents or guardians that desires to to have their student receive a grant under section 3 shall submit an application (with all necessary written proofs of eligibility attached) to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and including such information as the Secretary may reasonably require.

### **SEC. 5. USE OF GRANT FUNDS.**

(A) In General- Eligible Students receiving a grant under section 3 shall--

(1) sign contracts legally binding them to the soul use the grant money given for diagnostic testing for the learning disability and student the application was originally written for

(2) provide proof (such as a receipt) that the grant money was used only for diagnostic testing for the learning disability and student the application was originally written for

(3) provide the results of the testing to the secretary for research purposes only (If a result shows that the eligible student(s) do in fact have a learning disability; the Secretary must inform the legal parents or guardians of the available rights and resources now available to their students under the federal legislation IDEA or other, similar state legislation.)

#### **SEC. 7. RESTRICTION ON PAYMENTS.**

The Secretary shall make no payment to eligible student(s) under this Act unless the Secretary determines that the eligible student(s) has made arrangements to have the student in question tested for the presence of a learning disability.

#### **SEC. 8. REPORTING REQUIREMENT.**

An Secretary each year shall determine the effectiveness of the program implemented by the discovering the percentages and other statistical data about how many students tested using a grant under this act had test results that showed they did in fact have a learning disability, allowing them to find support under the federal legislation IDEA or other, similar state legislation.

#### **SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act all necessary funds for fiscal year 2012, as determined by the Secretary, and such sums as may be necessary for each of the succeeding 4 fiscal years.

#### **SEC. 10. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

This Act shall take effect 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act and shall not apply to conduct occurring before the effective date of this Act.

*Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities*

112th CONGRESS

1st Session

**H. R.**

To help teachers aid and support students with learning disabilities.

**IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**June 7, 2011**

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**A Bill**

To teachers to aid and support students with learning disabilities.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

**SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the 'TSWLD'.

**SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

In this Act:

(1) **LEARNING DISABILITY**- The term 'learning disability' refers to any disorder that interferes with a student's ability to learn or utilize language skills or academic skills (including but not limited to reading, writing, and arithmetic).

(A) 'Learning disability' includes but is not limited to Dyslexia, and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.

(2) **DYSLEXIA**- The term 'Dyslexia' refers to the disorder resulting in an impaired ability to interpret spatial relationships especially with language and number skills.

(3) **ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE DISORDER**- The term 'Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder' refers to the disorder characterized by inability by hyperactivity and impulsive and distracted/inattentive behavior.

(A) Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder may also be cited in this Bill as "ADHD."

(3) **SECRETARY**- The term 'Secretary' refers to the Secretary of Education.

(4) SCHOOLS- The term 'schools' refers to only United States public schools that offer any grades from Kindergarten through Twelfth Grade.

(5) DEVELOPMENT DAY- The term 'Development Day' in this bill refers to the federally mandated day where schools will organize for their teachers and staff for the purposes of:

(A) learning about difference learning disabilities (including but cannot be limited to Dyslexia and ADD)

(B) discovering ways to aid and support students and work with the families of students with learning disabilities

The day(s) (multiple days may be necessary and funded if form necessary by the secretary) must include professionals teaching on the topic of multiple common learning disabilities and interactive stations or activities for multidisciplinary learning for the teachers and staff. (Plans for these will be included in the application and must be approved by the Secretary.)

All teachers and a majority of other staff must attend (excusing only for illness or pre-approved make-ups at a more convenient date). Day(s) may be repeated and the staff split into the different days if faculty and staff is too large or this is necessary for operation of the school.

### **SEC. 3. PROGRAM AUTHORIZED.**

The Secretary is authorized to award federal grants/funds for the mandate up to the amounts deemed necessary by approved plans to all public schools for the soul purpose of paid teacher development day(s).

### **SEC. 4. APPLICATIONS.**

Schools ready to receive the a grant for the funded mandate under section 3 shall submit an application, with a written plan of the way and cost the teacher development will take place, to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and including such information as the Secretary may reasonably require.

**SEC. 5. USE OF GRANT FUNDS.**

(A) Schools receiving a funds for the mandate under section 3 shall--

(1) sign contracts legally binding them to the soul use the money given for diagnostic testing for the learning disability and student the application was originally written for

(2) provide proof (such as a receipt) that the money given was used only for development days for teacher and staff education on learning disability and student the application was originally written for

(3) have the teachers and staff who attended the development day(s) must complete a survey examining the effectiveness and amount of knowledge gleaned from the development day(s).

**SEC. 7. RESTRICTION ON PAYMENTS.**

The Secretary shall make no payment to eligible student(s) under this Act unless the Secretary determines that the school has an adequate plan for the development day(s).

**SEC. 8. REPORTING REQUIREMENT.**

An Secretary each year shall determine the effectiveness of the program implemented by the data collected by the schools after the development day(s). If the programs are shown to be ineffective the Secretary attempt to discover the reason and make the program more effective, even if this means strengthening the requirement for the development day(s).

**SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act all necessary funds for fiscal year 2012, as determined by the Secretary, and such sums as may be necessary for each of the succeeding 4 fiscal years.

**SEC. 10. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

This Act shall take effect 60 days after the date of the enactment of this Act after which schools shall have one year to submit a plan an application to the secretary and an additional year to have the development day(s) completed.

## ***School Nutrition***

*Maxine Orr*

*Nettie Mitchell-Brudnick*

*"We can all agree that in the wealthiest nation on Earth, all children should have the basic nutrition they need to learn and grow and to pursue their dreams, because in the end, nothing is more important than the health and well-being of our children. ... These are the basic values that we all share, regardless of race, party, religion. This is what we share."*

- First Lady Michelle Obama

### **Introduction:**

It is no secret that our nation is suffering from an obesity epidemic, especially in children – childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years and the prevalence of obesity among children aged 6 to 11 years increased from 6.5% in 1980 to 19.6% in 2008. The poor quality and low nutritional value of food served in school are significant contributing factors influencing these shocking statistics.

The issues of food waste and fighting hunger in America are related and equally important. Americans waste 29 million tons of food, annually, while 16.7 million go to bed hungry every night. Three recent bills/resolutions that address these key issues include H.R. 576, titled "Healthy Children Through School Nutrition Education Act" which promotes healthy eating and lifestyles, H.R. 207: School Food Recovery Act, which allocates left-over food from school cafeterias to food banks and homeless shelters, and H.RES 153, To express the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the school breakfast program, which recognizes the importance of the school breakfast program and its overall positive effect on the lives of low-income children and families. We would like to present these bills to Representative Anna G. Eshoo, in hope that she would cosponsor them and in doing so show her support for progressive school nutrition and the prevention of hunger.

### **Issue:**

Legislation has been introduced to encourage healthy eating since 1944, when then-Senator Richard B. Russell proposed a school lunch program designed to combat the problem of malnutrition, the *National School Lunch Act*. Its primary purpose was to promote an improved for school children nutritional standard. Since its introduction, Congress has amended the act many times, with an increase in funding by over five billion dollars by the turn of the twenty-first century. At that time, it provided lunches to twenty-five million students nationwide. The National School Lunch Act led directly to the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, which allowed the Department of Agriculture to expand on their nutrition programs. As a result, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children was established in 1972.

Governmental reform of school nutrition has continued to evolve over the years: in 2006 legislators proposed banning the sale of sugary sodas during school hours and implemented certain regulations on the amount of fat and calories within a meal: yet there has been very little discussion about where the uneaten cafeteria lunches go. A large amount of food is being wasted everyday (about 10 to 35% in an average school cafeteria), while millions go hungry. Currently, the USDA Western Region Office and the Nutrition Services Division of the California Department of Education of CalRecycle have set up a program where schools (if they choose) can

donate leftover food to charitable feeding programs rather discarding it. A district wide program also exists in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Tulsa program has seen much success 4,000 pounds of food are recovered each month from 20 participating schools. The food recovery programs have been productively implemented in a small scale, yet a nationwide program has yet to be created.

“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day” is very much a fact. Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between eating breakfast and test scores. It is seen that students who have their breakfast regularly score better in their tests than those who avoid eating breakfast. Recently there have been laws implemented regarding, and is support of serving breakfast in school cafeterias. Senator Nava’s bill requiring breakfast to be served at low-income schools became a law in New Mexico on April 2, 2011. Another bill, titled Pupil nutrition: Federal School Breakfast Program Participation would require “a state declaration regarding the importance of breakfast to the achievement of pupils and would require school districts to undertake specific actions to increase access to the federal School Breakfast Program.” Supplying nutritious food in the morning to low income students is extremely important, without it they have no fuel to get them through the school day and their course work. There has been much support of breakfast in school and it is important to continue this.

### **Proposal:**

We will be focusing on three bills, introduced in 2011. H.R. 576, *Healthy Children Through School Nutrition Education Act* was introduced on the ninth of February, 2011 and amends the Richard B. Russell *National School Lunch Act*, which would require educational facilities a part of the school lunch or breakfast programs to "include in their school wellness policies the requirement that each student receive 50 hours of nutrition education each school year." This instruction would have to meet specific standards and promote healthy eating and lifestyles. It has so far had no major actions and is sponsored by Rep. Joe Baca with five cosponsors. By supporting this bill, Rep. Eshoo would be demonstrating her support for progressive school nutrition, specifically in terms of integration into the instructional aspect of education.

H.R. 207, *School Food Recovery Act*, was introduced on January 6, 2011 by Congressman Tom Petri of Wisconsin. The Act amends the Richard B. Russell *National School Lunch Act*. The purpose of the *School Food Recovery Act* is “to keep excess school food out of the garbage and get it into food banks.... (And to) clarify that schools and school districts are covered under the Good Samaritan Act and explicitly permit the donation of excess food that would otherwise be thrown away...” The bill currently has three co-sponsors and no major action. In supporting the School Food Recovery Act, Congresswoman Eshoo would be aiding the movement to end hunger in America, as well as preventing waste and encouraging sustainability within school nutrition systems.

A recent resolution that supports a nation-wide school lunch program is, a resolution to express the sense of the Senate regarding the school breakfast program (H.RES.153). The resolution was introduced on March 8, 2011 by Representative Gwen Moore, has 21 co-sponsors and no major actions. The Resolution acknowledges the importance of breakfast and its effect on low income students, as well as “expresses the support of the House of Representatives for states that have successfully implemented school breakfast programs in order to improve the test scores and grades of their participating students.” The resolution proposes that states expand the access to breakfast to more students, improve the quality and nutritional value of all breakfast food served, and to “inform students and parents of healthy nutritional and lifestyle choices.” Representative

Eshoo's support of this bill would further affirm her support of the youth and healthy eating in America.

As part of our proposal, we would like to ask and encourage Representative Eshoo to sign on to the growing list of co-sponsors for H.R. 576, *Healthy Children Through School Nutrition Education Act*, H.R. 207, *School Food Recovery Act* and A resolution to express the sense of the Senate regarding the school breakfast program (H.RES.153). Rep. Eshoo's support would mean a very impacted step forward for these bills, which deserve to become an active part of our educational system. It is vital that representatives who have the ability to make a positive difference in school nutrition speak up and take part.

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## ***Environmental Education and Implementation in Schools***

*Hyllery Hershberger*

*Miri Becker*

### **Background:**

In the United States, there is a dire need for reformation in the energy industry. The United States government has been taking steps to stop the degradation of the environment and to advocate energy efficiency, and some progress has been made, but more has to be done. The concepts and ideas of this reform are present, but more support from the American public is necessary if any change is going to be made. The foundation of environmental education needs to be strengthened and the youth of our nation need to be better informed. If we can manage to acquire the needed support and cooperation, we can take additional steps in the direction of sustainability. The United States Congress has passed multiple bills concerning the environment, and most have come to the conclusion that the limiting factors are funding and knowledge. By educating the administration of corporations and the upcoming generations that will be assuming these roles, more informed decisions could be made. Students need to be educated on environmental issues, and the best place to do this is in schools, since such a large amount of time is spent there. It would be pertinent if the educational atmosphere reflected the ideas that were being taught; schools should themselves be environmentally friendly, as an example to the students. Many schools are against this idea of renovation for optimum energy use due to the initial cost that it would take, but in the long run, being energy efficient will be monetarily beneficial for the school. There are already bills being passed in Congress about building codes for buildings, like the *American Clean Energy and Security Act* (H.R. 2454) which was passed by the House in 2009, and it would be worth it to extend these requirements to school building codes.

### **Issues:**

The main component of fighting against environmental issues that needs to be improved is uniform education. Many citizens in the US are vaguely aware of how their lifestyle affects the environment, but the quality and occurrence of this knowledge must be improved if more rapid progress is to be made. In 1997 the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation issued a survey to 1501 US citizens that assessed their knowledge about environmental issues. 67% of the surveyed group didn't know that the primary source of electricity in the US is burning fossil fuels [1]. Even if this particular group of people doesn't provide sufficient information, the fact that a lot of people aren't informed on basic concepts of global warming and other environmental degradations is holding the third most populated country in the world back from its full potential.

Schools use a surprisingly large amount of resources in order to keep the students comfortable and provided for. In the United States, the K-12 school districts combined spend \$6 billion on energy per year, and up to 30% of that energy is used inefficiently and therefore wasted [2]. Many schools are unaware of opportunities for saving energy, and so they leave lights on when unneeded or leave the thermostat up at night when it can be turned down to conserve energy. The hefty amount of energy used supports the use of fossil fuels, which wreaks havoc on the environment. Renewable energy is, at present, not used very often in schools, but it could be very beneficial both academically and monetarily after being utilized. Water waste is another huge issue in schools, and installing grey-water and rain-catching systems could save 25-75% of water used [3]. Many schools are hastily built, allowing for inefficiency and waste of water and energy.

**Proposal:**

Concerning funding for this proposal, money spent on this education and building codes would be an investment. It is imperative to realize that by reducing spending in other areas concerning environmental degradation (such as trying to convince corporations to change their established methods) and redistributing the budget to improve the environmental education of the upcoming generation, their support and consequently their family's support will be with the environmental movement. Students spend a significant amount of time studying history and microscopic science that is realistically hard to grasp because one cannot touch or directly experience it. The study of the environment is relevant to everyone because everything they do has a consequence in environment and they can see and experience what is happening in the environment.

The first step that needs to be taken is an assessment of the extent of knowledge in the US. The EPA needs to make another survey similar to the one in 1997, and find out exactly what Americans know. This survey would be taken by as many Americans as possible, especially in education systems. With this assessment, the EPA and legislators can focus more specifically and efficiently where needed. Consequently, schools can be given specific curricula that will teach the upcoming generations what they need to know to make intelligent decisions. If every American can enter the environmental conversation, the transition to the reforms necessary in industry and environmental policy will not only be understood scientifically, but also supported and better funded economically by the common people.

In order to battle the misuse of energy in schools, it should be law that all new schools built should follow the "whole building" systems design as part of the EnergySmart Schools plan that has been proposed by Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy which is part of the Department of Energy. This includes more planning than a conventional school, because all the ventilation, heating, and cooling systems must work together for minimal waste. It does not have to be more expensive to build an efficient, or high-performance, school, and the federal government should give grants or tax breaks to schools that want to renovate and lower their environmental impact. Most schools have an abundance of space for solar panels to be installed, on roofs or elsewhere. The existence of solar panels or other renewable energy would give the school an opportunity to teach their students about such things, in order to better prepare them for what must be coming in the future. Solar panels pay for themselves after around five years in most circumstances, so even though the number of solar panels a school could have is probably not enough to power the whole school, it would greatly reduce the amount of money that schools spend on energy each year. The money that is saved from having solar panels could then be invested in other necessities for the school, like paper and pencils for the students.

**Conclusion:**

The American public and government should not be satisfied with our current situation regarding energy use and education. There are many steps that need to be taken in order for our level of conservation to be anywhere near acceptable, and that needs to begin in the education of the American youth about what environmental issues are relevant and how they can react to such issues. The optimum place to expose them to this knowledge is in school systems. This kind of renovation and specific education can be implemented in all levels of school from elementary to high school, and colleges can be encouraged to do so as well, especially because their students can be a huge part in developing such systems. Such renovations have already begun in some colleges and even high schools, but the idea needs to be further publicized and extended. Environmental Education needs to become a standard necessity rather than a luxury.

- [1] <http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/pdf/19-keyfindings.pdf>
- [2] [http://www.energystar.gov/ia/business/challenge/learn\\_more/Schools.pdf](http://www.energystar.gov/ia/business/challenge/learn_more/Schools.pdf)
- [3] <http://www1.eere.energy.gov/buildings/energysmartschools/design.html>

## ***Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Unionization***

*Peter Horton*

*“If you want to make a difference in the life of our nation; if you want to make a difference in the life of a child - become a teacher.”*

– President Barack Obama

### **Recruitment and Retention:**

Two of the serious problems in education in America are the low rate of teacher retention and difficulty of attracting great teachers (problems that are exacerbated in low-income areas). Nearly half of all teachers (46%) leave the profession in their first five years. Furthermore, studies show that teachers with higher scores on standardized tests and certification exams in high school and college tend to be more effective, but they are also more likely to change jobs.<sup>1</sup>

A major way to address this is through salary, which is consistently among the top three factors that teachers cite when leaving the profession. The median expected salary for high school teachers is about \$53,000 a year, meaning essentially that intelligent, educated college students who choose to go into education are taking a penalty of the thousands of dollars more they could earn in many other fields. Increased salary would attract more teachers, and improve the retention rate. Weighting salary by area can also be used to create an incentive for teaching in troubled schools. Use of merit pay can be applied nationwide to reward good teachers, though this first requires the implementation of a fair evaluation system.

Teachers who leave the profession also cite lack of support as a major factor.<sup>2</sup> Relative to other developed countries, with successful education programs, teachers in the U.S. are thrown into the classroom in their first year and left on their own. Since 1960, expenditure per student has nearly tripled, average teacher experience has increased, the percentage of teachers with masters degrees has doubled, and student – teacher ratio has gone down by more than ten students per teacher, yet student performance has been roughly unchanged.<sup>3</sup> New ways of directing funding should be considered, and increased teacher development is a good potential area to invest in.

At least four current bills in the House, HR 35, 85, 135, and 694, attempt to help teachers through loan forgiveness and tax credit, and are good but insufficient. H.R.1368, Securing Teacher Effectiveness, Leadership, Learning, And Results Act of 2011 is also a worthwhile bill, which seeks to establish an evaluation system.

### **Unionization:**

Major players in the reform process, and the recent recipients of a great deal of blame, are the teachers unions. Unions have been an obstacle to reform, protecting an ineffective tenure system, resisting merit pay, and protecting poor teachers. What must be avoided, however, is confusing the need for pressure on unions to prioritize students (as they are beginning to do; the AFT has become a supporter of fair merit pay and tenure reform and acknowledges the need to remove bad teachers) with a need to dismantle teachers unions, which would silence teachers, one of the groups most invested in education reform and with the most firsthand knowledge of education in this country.

**Conclusion:**

The United States faces a major problem in its low teacher retention and recruitment rates, especially for more qualified teachers. It is a problem that is worse in poor areas and that will become intensified in the future, as retiring baby-boomer teachers create an unprecedented need in the field. There are ways to respond, however: teacher development, increased salaries, and possibly merit pay. In this spirit, I would recommend that Congresswoman Eshoo support the aforementioned bills (although I'm sure she would have already) and any like them. It should be noted, though, that the sums that these bills deal with are too small to make a major difference; they are in some ways more symbolic than truly helpful. If any bills are introduced in the future that support a significant pay increase or tax /debt reduction for teachers, I urge Congresswoman Eshoo to support it.

1. <http://educationnext.org/the-mystery-of-good-teaching/>  
2000d. *Monitoring School Quality: An Indicators Report*. NCES 2001-030. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
2. [http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Teacher\\_Turnover/](http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Teacher_Turnover/)
3. US Department of Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 2009* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)

*Examining the Overlapping Issues of United States Education and Immigration Policy*  
Brittany L. Whitehill

**Introduction:**

For decades, politicians of the United States have stated that educating the youth, and thus investing in their human capital, is vital to the growth and progress of the nation as a whole. Despite their zeal to promote the bettering of education, the platforms of politicians and legislators often fail to represent their stated opinions regarding public education, or rather, fail to alleviate the discrepancy among the recipients of the quality education which they promoted. In particular, our nation's legislators' priority to adamantly secure our borders with strict immigration policy often undermines the sphere of education by refusing to provide quality public education to children who are not legal citizens. Although the intentions of such policy are often to avoid the unjust allocation of jobs and social privileges of adults who are undocumented, failing to educate possibly undocumented youth and allow them a clear path to citizenship is a vicious cycle.

In addition, considering the socioeconomic climate of the twentieth-century world, focusing education on social sciences, communication, and government, in addition to the often focused on STEM method of education, or focus upon Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics is crucial in assuring that future generations will have not only have the technological knowledge to progress in the world, but also a comprehensive education in humanities.

The two topics of reforming immigration and education policy to be more inclusive while providing those inhabiting America with sufficient educational opportunities, and reforming the curriculum taught in schools to better prepare students to handle our nation's most pressing issues, like immigration policy, go hand in hand.

**Issues:**

With the national push to better educate the youth of the United States, it is crucial to invest in the human capital of every child who could contribute to our nation's progress, despite their current state of citizenship. For decades, legislators, including Congresswoman Eshoo, have worked to develop legislation to provide educational opportunities and a path to citizenship for undocumented youth; however, the nature of disagreement within partisan US politics has often hindered progress regarding this issue. Although political ideals regarding the topics of education and immigration often conflict to a degree, there is and has been proposed legislation that focuses on educating children who have immigrated to the United States and providing them a clear path to citizenship, without compromising national security. The national battle regarding immigration policy to the United States can only be temporarily alleviated with reform in immigration policy. Superior education regarding immigration and other similar social issues, in which children attain knowledge in the humanities and become equipped to solve such issues for generations to come, is the key to progress regarding immigration policy.

The *DREAM Act*, acronym for Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors, was originally proposed to the Senate in August of 2001, and most recently proposed to the Senate on May 11, 2011. Versions of this Act have been proposed to both the US Senate and the US House of Representatives numerous times within the past decade. In short, the *DREAM Act* intends to provide conditional permanent residency to some undocumented and deportable alien students

who graduate from US high schools, who are of good moral character, arrived in the U.S. legally or illegally as minors, and have been in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment. Despite the bill's lack of bipartisan support, the *DREAM Act* could be a crucial step to bettering US immigration policy and education policy likewise.

Because optimal education is so vital in assuring justice throughout the United States and the well-being of its citizens for generations to come, education and immigration policy overlap drastically and must be regarded with equal and grave importance. Another equally crucial topic regarding the prosperity of our nation and the enhancement of its public education is the curriculum being taught to students. Social and political issues like illegal immigration can only truly be solved one way – by an educated populous, through diplomacy. With this concept in mind, legislators must bear in mind that to alleviate the effects of issues that burden our nation like illegal immigration, they must address the source of the solution which is a generation of people with the education needed to address such issues. Although the recent national push to reform curriculum to focus more on science, mathematics, technology, and engineering will certainly aid in American progress internationally as a twenty-first century world power, we must not neglect to sufficiently incorporate comprehensive social science and humanities education into the curriculum.

**Proposal:**

The proposed bill in the Senate, S.6.IS, *Reform America's Broken Immigration System* ideally addresses the issue of educating illegal immigrant youth. This bill aims to strengthen border security while simultaneously advocating for Acts like the *DREAM Act*, which provide students under the age of sixteen who have not attained citizenship to do so in addition to educating them. The Student Advisory board proposes that Representative Eshoo regards this senate bill as a guideline. We hope that she is willing to support similar bills that are introduced into The House of Representatives.

H.R.1109, the *GENIUS Act*, or *Global Education in the Nexus US Act*, would further promote education of our nation's and world's most pressing issues, including illegal immigration, to be included in primary and secondary core curriculum. Promoting education regarding these issues from a younger age and in greater depth would be, essentially, an investment in knowledge and possibly permanent solutions to these issues. Although math, science and technology often receive focus as the most crucial subjects to invest education in, social science and international studies education is equally as vital in ensuring that our nation's youth will be able to progress with the rest of the world. In addition to supporting the *DREAM Act* and other similar immigration legislation, we propose that Representative Eshoo supports this bill aiming to reform curriculum to comprehensively focus on social sciences without compromising the vitality of programs to support the bettering of STEM education approaches.

Lastly, we suggest that Representative Eshoo support any future reintroduction of the *DREAM Act*, for this act truly does provide our nation's youth sufficient education and facilitates a path to citizenship for those who have immigrated illegally, without compromising our nation's security. It is crucial to invest in the human capital of our nation through education, and at times the investments we must make mean educating and providing citizenship to those who are not current US citizens. Moreover, we see it necessary to educate our youth regarding global issues to alleviate ignorance and the issues like our broken immigration system from plaguing our nation's future.

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## ***Improving Public Schools***

*Tim Steinberg*

### **Introduction:**

For many years people have been saying that the United States is falling behind in education and will produce fewer and fewer well educated citizens in the coming years. Recently the Program for International Student Assessment has proven this in an international test. Students were tested on math, science, and reading all over the world. From the countries tested the US ranked from 15<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, doing best in reading and worst in math. This clearly shows that we need to improve our education system if we plan on competing in the world market.

For Representative Eshoo's Student Advisory Board I have chosen to take a look at private and charter schools in order to find out how to improve the public school educational system. A private school is a privately funded school that is conducted and maintained by a group rather than the government. A charter school is a publicly funded school that is independently run and maintained. If we take a look at these different types of schools and the success they have, we may be able to help the public schools improve.

### **Issues:**

In order to be a world power and an active participant in the world economy the United States needs to improve its education system. This is said over and over again, but rarely comes with an actual proposal of what to do. In order to formulate a possible solution I have chosen to take a look at the private and charter schools in the US and see why they perform better than the rest.

I first analyzed a study done by the Center on Education Policy that shows public schools actually equaling the performance of the private schools when certain factors were taken into consideration. What I realized from this study was that those factors must be what the United States needs to change in its public education system, in order to help students improve. Private schools easily tested higher than public schools as a whole, until the test looked at individual students seeing what all the high scoring students had in common. The factors that were taken into consideration in the study were: pre-high school education, access to resources(economics), and parent involvement. What this means is that students who are more advanced before high school will perform better than the rest if they are in either public or private school. This would be the same with the students who have access to resources and those with greater parent involvement. Private schools with merit based entrance then get many of the students who have these three factors and will already do better in school.

Out of those three factors and the easiest to change is pre-high school education. To find out what pre-high school education needs in order to improve I looked to the charter schools. During junior high I was a student of Nature Academy, a school within a school. This charter school program is what I consider one of the greatest building blocks of my education. Even now as I am graduating high school I can see that many of the top students also went through Nature Academy. Looking at what the charter school did well, I hope to see what it is in pre-high school education that needs to be improved.

### **Proposal:**

Remembering that the United States is furthest behind in math, I decided to look at a personal experience with charter school to see how they worked differently. Through the promotion of

STEM, or science, technology, engineering, and math; charter schools are able to have students learn much better. In a public school, students will attend about six different classes throughout the week learning six different subjects. In charter school we also learned six different subjects, but in all of them the STEM curriculum was present. In history we would see technology development; in the electives we would learn science. Interclass involvement like this is what separated the charter school from the public school. I observed this only once in high school during Team. Team was a separate World History class and World Literature class with matching curriculums. For example, while we were learning about World War I we would also be reading a book in which we could really understand what those who were there experienced. This involvement of the STEM classes and parallel curriculums is what students in the public schools need in order to improve.

Changes that need to be made begin at the elementary school level. Some students are able to quickly learn the STEM curriculum and grasp the social sciences as well. These students are then more likely to enter into private or charter schools. Once into private or charter schools the students are placed on an accelerated program that allows them to learn faster and test higher. The problem lies in the public schools' inability to realize that many of their students have not been able to grasp the basic concepts in the STEM classes. Trying to have test scores equal to that of a private school a public school can actually hurt itself. Instead of focusing on improvement, public schools focus on raw scores. Public schools must realize that education in STEM classes is very linear. One concept is learned, then that is used to move onto another concept. To improve this system, students must know the basics and be able to completely understand them. This may mean that some classes slow down so that students fully comprehend the entire curriculum. This would cause students to have a stronger base of knowledge giving them a greater ability to learn and improve.

### **Conclusion:**

In order for the quality of education to improve in the United States we need to improve our public schools. To do this I have looked to our private and charter schools to find out what they do better. I found that what public schools lack is students who have better pre-high school education. The key to solving this problem is better implementing the STEM program in early education. Representative Eshoo has already cosponsored H.Res.91 which recognizes the Association for Women in Science for supporting the STEM curriculum. By supporting legislation similar to this we will be able to make a change in our entire education system, increasing the United States ability to continue to participate in the industrial forefront of the world. By covering the basics of education, we will be able to create a better education.

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## ***Conclusion***

*Brittany L. Whitehill*

*Nettie Mitchell-Brudnick*

The relevance and importance of education reform is constant and ever growing. We feel strongly that education's evolution and improvement are essential to the general well-being of our nation for generations to come. Education conduces diplomatic relations and progress, both nationally and globally. Compromising the quality of education will have a grave impact on the progress our nation is capable of making. Although these solutions are only a drop in the bucket towards bettering education in the United States, we hope our presentations tonight have brought light to the overall issue, and inspired change for the better.

Our board boasts a wide range of talented students, and we would like to take this opportunity to allow them to share a little about themselves and their futures.

The Student Advisory Board was inspired as a group, and as individuals, by countless people throughout this process. We would like to thank our families, who have supported us throughout this experience, and our educators, especially San Lorenzo Valley High School's A.P. Government instructor Ms. Martínez and A.P. United States History instructor Ms. Salido for their constant advocacy and dedication to their students. We owe endless gratitude to Christine Padilla for inspiring, guiding and encouraging us in our endeavor. Christine has shown limitless commitment and enthusiasm in assuring that the Student Advisory Board experience was enriching for the board members and the community at large.

We want to express our deepest respect and appreciation to Representative Anna Eshoo, for empowering our community's youth to play a keystone role in political activism and reform. The Congresswoman is truly an inspiration to our community and country.