

History of the Alliance for Excellent Education

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy organization that works to make every child a high school graduate—to prepare them for college, work, and to be contributing members of society. Since its founding in 2001, the Alliance has published a host of briefs, reports, and fact sheets; held numerous events, both on Capitol Hill and around the country; and collaborated with policymakers, researchers, and educators to advance this goal. This timeline highlights key moments in the Alliance’s history; to review complete lists of Alliance for Excellent Education publications and events, please click the relevant links on the homepage.

2001

Lilo and Gerard Leeds establish and launch the Alliance for Excellent Education. Founders of CMP Media, Inc. and refugees from Germany in the 1930s, the couple (pictured at right) seeks to give back to their adopted country of the United States by working to improve the education of the children most at risk of failure.



Susan Frost is hired as the Alliance’s president. Ms. Frost, a former official at the U.S. Department of Education, launches the Alliance’s work by consulting with experts on middle and high school reform across the nation and beginning to develop a federal policy agenda that supports effective change.

Investing in Excellence: Making Title I Work for All Students is released. The Alliance’s first report calls for full funding of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and recommends that part of the investment be targeted to support secondary school reform.



The Alliance’s biweekly newsletter on issues related to high school reform, *Straight A’s*, begins publication. *Straight A’s* focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC, and around the country, reporting on policy, research, and politics.

2002

The National Advisory Board is formed. Composed of distinguished educators, researchers, and policymakers all knowledgeable in various aspects of secondary education and reform, the board helps to guide the development of the Alliance’s thinking and policy agenda.

Every Child a Graduate: A Framework for Excellent Education for All Middle and High School Students is published. This report lays out the Alliance’s federal policy agenda for helping the six million students most at risk of leaving school unprepared for college, work, and life, addressing areas including adolescent literacy, teacher and principal quality, college preparation, and small learning communities. The report is released at the National Press Club, at an event featuring former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley (pictured at right).



Capitol Hill briefing is held to release *New Teacher Excellence: Retaining Our Best*, which makes the case for teacher mentoring and induction programs. Senator Jack Reed (RI) speaks at the event.

2003

Adolescent Literacy Advisory Group is established.

Five reports are released during the year:

- *Left Out and Left Behind: NCLB and the American High School*
- *Investing in the Education of Older Students: A Summary of the Evidence*
- *Progress Report on American High Schools*
- *Adolescents and Literacy: Reading for the Twenty-first Century*
- *The Literacy Coach: A Key to Improving Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools.*

The Alliance holds its first national high school policy conference. About two hundred policymakers, educators, and concerned citizens gathered at the National Press Club to learn about and discuss “Challenges Confronting High Schools: Literacy, Adequacy, and Equity.” Presenters include Senator Patty Murray (WA) and Representatives Susan Davis (CA), Chaka Fattah (PA) (pictured at the right), Rubén Hinojosa (TX), and Chris Van Hollen (MD).



2004



A letter is sent to President Bush and Congress urging creation of a federal program to help the millions of adolescents who read below grade level. An additional thirty-two national organizations and 170 individuals sign the open letter, which is widely distributed and published in *Education Week*. The president calls for a new program to support struggling adolescent readers—the Striving Readers initiative—in his State of the Union address and 2005 budget proposal.

Teacher and Principal Quality Advisory Group is established.

Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy is published.

This widely read report describes fifteen key elements of an effective literacy intervention and calls key stakeholders—from parents to policymakers—to action.



The Alliance launches a series of briefings on adolescent literacy programs and issues that continues into 2005. This program helps to focus the attention of educators and policymakers on the importance of the issue and on what is happening in schools and states across the nation. Speakers include Alabama Senators Jeff Sessions and Richard Shelby.

Tapping the Potential, an update of New Teacher Excellence, is published. Senator Jack Reed (RI) speaks at the release event.

The Alliance provides information on the crisis in America’s high schools to over 750 candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

Second conference on American high school policy is held: “Preparing Today’s Leaders for Tomorrow’s High Schools.” Secondary school practitioners, along with policymakers, researchers, advocates, and other representatives from the education and policy communities gather to discuss what leaders need to know to transform high schools to meet the needs of the twenty-first century.

Federal funding is approved for the Striving Readers initiative, a demonstration adolescent literacy program that eventually reaches eight sites around the nation.

Dan Leeds becomes chair of the board. The son of the Alliance founders, successful businessman, and political leader was an original governing board member; he assumes the chairmanship of the board when his father resigns that position. Gerry and Lilo Leeds continue their involvement with the Alliance in other leadership positions on the board.

2005



Governor Bob Wise is named president of the Alliance. A former governor and nine-term congressman from West Virginia, Gov. Wise (pictured at left) is recruited to lead the Alliance and expand its work, focusing on building the public will for effective secondary school reform as well as supporting the policies that make that reform possible.

The Alliance works with *U.S. News & World report* to develop a feature article on adolescent literacy.

State education information cards are published and distributed to governors, members of Congress, and others. The annually updated state cards provide statistics on assessment scores, graduation rates, and data systems for each of the fifty states and the District of Columbia.

“Teacher Attrition: A Costly Loss to the Nation and to the States,” is published. This issue brief is the first in an occasional series that examines nationally and for each state the economic and social impact of America’s current educational system.

National poll examining public attitudes about high schools is commissioned and released. The first comprehensive survey to be conducted following announcements by President Bush and many governors of major initiatives to improve the education of older students shows that the American public recognizes the problems and overwhelmingly wants governors, members of Congress, and the president to pay more attention to high schools.

The Alliance is one of ten founding partners in the Data Quality Campaign (DQC). The DQC works to build support and political will among policymakers to develop high-quality, education data systems in every state to improve student achievement.

Report requested by Governor Janet Napolitano, *Improving Adolescent Literacy in Arizona: A Report to the Governor’s P–20 Council*, is released and distributed.

2006

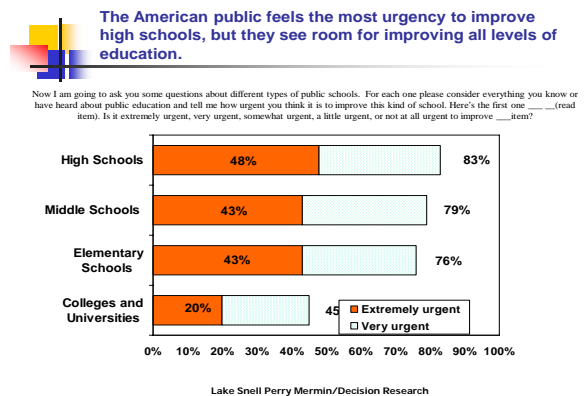
The Alliance and the Data Quality Campaign cohost a two-day symposium on the importance of longitudinal data systems. Speakers, including Delaware Secretary of Education Valerie Woodruff, discuss the importance of building statewide data systems to improve graduation rates and close achievement gaps.



***Who’s Counted? Who’s Counting? Understanding High School Graduation Rates* published.** The report explains the need for uniformly calculated, accurate graduation rates.

Alabama’s Senator Jeff Sessions and Governor Bob Riley speak at adolescent literacy conference in Birmingham cohosted by the Alliance.

Representative Chaka Fattah (PA) joins Paul Vallas, CEO of Philadelphia Public Schools, at a Capitol Hill briefing on “What Works for Urban High Schools?” Also in attendance are U.S. Congressmen Elijah Cummings (MD) and Donald M. Payne (NJ).



“Ten Elements of a Successful High School” is published in English and Spanish. This brochure provides information to parents, community leaders, and others concerned with improving secondary schools about how to evaluate their schools and advocate on behalf of their students.

National policy symposium focusing on middle-level education is convened. Event features remarks by middle school experts, U.S. Department of Education representatives, and Congressman Chaka Fattah (PA).

Candidates mailing is developed and distributed. Information on high schools is sent to over one thousand candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and state governorships.

High school policy conference focused on “Taking the Next Step: Defining a Shared Federal Agenda for High School Reform” is held. More than three hundred people gather to discuss successful strategies in high school reform and what a shared agenda for reform might look like. Speakers include Hugh Price of the Brookings Institution and Michelle Rhee of The New Teacher Project.

Two literacy reports, *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High School* and *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent English Language Learners*, are published.



Forum on teaching English language learners features U.S. Senators Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye from Hawaii as speakers. This event is part of a series of forums designed to highlight successful practices in secondary education.

2007

“Viewer’s Guide” for the president’s State of the Union address is published.

A briefing entitled “What’s Working in High School Reform?” is held. The event provides an overview of recent research into what educational reforms and interventions are—or are not—working for students in America’s chronically low-performing high schools. Senators Jeff Bingaman (NM) and Richard Burr (NC) speak.

Seven pieces of Alliance-supported federal legislation are introduced in Congress. They include the Striving Readers Act, Graduation Promise Act, Every Student Counts Act, GRADUATES Act, a Senate bill regarding state longitudinal data systems, the Success in the Middle Act, and the METRICS Act.

The Alliance holds a regional adolescent literacy summit in Ohio. Representative Ralph Regula (OH) gives remarks.

Alliance President Bob Wise testifies before committees in both chambers of Congress. He discusses the critical need to expand No Child Left Behind to include a greater focus on secondary schools, so that all students receive the support they need to graduate from high school with a meaningful diploma.



The Campaign for High School Equity is launched. Nine national organizations representing communities of color join with the Alliance to create the Campaign for High School Equity (organization representatives pictured at left), a first-of-its-kind national partnership to reform U.S. high schools. Representatives Elijah Cummings (MD), Danny Davis (IL), and Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (VA) speak at the event.

Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: *Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement* is published. Reading and writing instruction must be included in all academic areas if student literacy is to improve.



Conference in the San Francisco Bay area is cohosted by the Alliance with the goal of making connections between local and national priorities in high school reform. Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee George Miller (CA) (pictured at left) and Representative Barbara Lee (CA) make remarks.

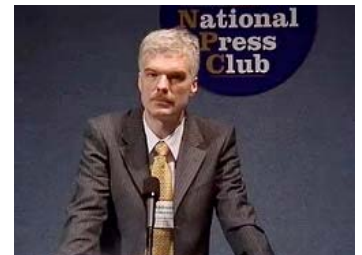
C-SPAN carries a live broadcast of the Alliance’s event “Turning Around Low-Performing High Schools: Lessons for Federal Policy from Research and Practice” from the Russell Senate Office Building.

The Alliance publishes “High School Teaching for the Twenty-first Century: Preparing Students for College,” which focuses on the course work and teaching students need in order to graduate college-ready.

High school policy conference with the theme of “From No Child Left Behind to Every Child a Graduate” is held. About three hundred people consider specific policies to improve high schools that should be included in the No Child Left Behind Act reauthorization. Johns Hopkins University researcher Robert Balfanz is presented with the inaugural Every Child a Graduate Award for his continued commitment to improving America’s secondary schools. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (MA) and Representative Rubén Hinojosa (TX) address the conference attendees.

Associated Press sheds light on “dropout factories.” The term becomes a buzzword as the piece, which was informed by the Alliance staff, is picked up by hundreds of papers and other publications.

The Alliance cohosts a briefing on the 2006 results of the Programme for International Assessment (PISA). Andreas Schleicher, director of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s PISA program (pictured at the right), presented on the importance of the test, one of the few assessments that allows the United States to compare the performance of its students to that of young people in other countries.

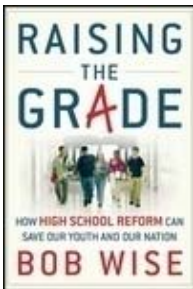


2008

The Alliance hosts a high school reform summit in Chicago, at which Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan and Senator Richard Durbin (IL) speak.

The Capitol Hill event “Improving No Child Left Behind: The Cost of Waiting” is co-organized by the Alliance. Hosted by Commission on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) cochairs Roy Barnes and Tommy Thompson, stakeholders from the policy and education fields discuss NCLB reauthorization and the ill effects of further delaying it.

The *New York Times* draws attention to disparities in graduation rate calculations in a front-page article informed by the Alliance, entitled “States’ Data Obscure How Few Finish High School” by Sam Dillon.



Raising the Grade: How High School Reform Can Save Our Youth and Our Nation, is published. Authored by Alliance President Bob Wise, *Raising the Grade* describes the costs of the long-term neglect of secondary education, lays out the moral and economic reasons for increasing investment in high schools, and gives concrete examples of solutions that are working in some schools that could serve as models for others.

The Wise Words video series debuts. In this monthly series, Bob Wise addresses issues related to high school reform and the dropout crisis.

The Secondary School Improvement Advisory Group is formed.

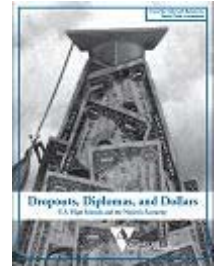
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President’s Policy Council is established. The council includes some of the most respected thinkers in the nation on issues related to improving the achievement and attainment levels of students in the secondary grades.

Jonathan Alter devotes a *Newsweek* column to the crisis in America’s high schools, centered around an interview with Bob Wise.

Bob Wise reports “live” from the Olympics on international competitiveness. “Standing” before Bird’s Nest Stadium in Beijing, Wise compares the performance of U.S. athletes at the Olympics against overall American academic performance in education.

***Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars: U.S. High Schools and the Nation’s Economy* is published.** This report examines the impact of the dropout crisis on the dropouts themselves, as well as its effect on the economy, social fabric, and security of the nation, states, and local communities.



***From No Child Left Behind to Every Child a Graduate* is published.**

This report, an update of 2002’s *Every Child a Graduate*, lays out the Alliance for Excellent Education’s comprehensive policy framework for action to improve America’s secondary schools and the achievement and attainment levels of their students.

A standing-room-only crowd gathers for a briefing on “Student Engagement as a Dropout Prevention Strategy.” Alliance governing board members Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond and Dr. Pedro Noguera, and Representative Rubén Hinojosa (TX) are among the speakers.

The Alliance mails information on the high school crisis to over eight hundred Congressional and gubernatorial candidates.

The Every Student Counts Act is introduced in the Senate.

“Understanding Graduation Rates” fact sheets are published. Providing information on the different ways that graduation rates are calculated, these state-specific fact sheets also highlight the graduation gaps between white students and students of color, and estimate the economic costs of dropouts.