



Senators unveil initiative to invest \$2.5B in high schools

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As the congressional education committees prepare to examine ways to improve the nation's uneven high school performance record, a handful of senators influencing the discussion are proposing legislation to authorize \$2.5 billion for high schools.

After working on the details with stakeholders for several months, Sen. **Jeff Bingaman**, D-N.M., introduced the bipartisan bill late Monday with support from Sen. **Edward Kennedy**, D-Mass., chairman of the [Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee](#), and Sen. **Richard Burr**, R-N.C.

The introduction is particularly timely considering that the committee meets today to consider ways to incorporate middle schools and high schools into the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, which Kennedy could introduce as early as July.

Bingaman's Graduation Promise Act appears to already have strong support. A handful of organizations - the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#), the [Center for American Progress](#), [Jobs for the Future](#), and the [National Council of La Raza](#) -- endorsed it even before Bingaman had a chance to introduce it to the Senate. The groups released a statement of support early in the day, saying that the bill would address problems associated with a high dropout rate among minority and low-income students.

"America is facing a dropout crisis," said **John Podesta**, the Center for American Progress's president and CEO, adding that Congress needs to act soon to reverse the trend.

While the legislation would not appropriate funds, it would authorize the government to create and expand incentives for spurring improvements in secondary schools. It would:

- Create a federal-state-local partnership program focused on transforming the nation's lowest performing high schools.
- Provide resources for high school educators and students facing the greatest challenges.
- Strengthen state systems to identify, differentiate among, and target resources to low performing high schools.
- Support state efforts to align their systems with expectations of college and the workforce.
- Ensure transparency and accountability in the state support process.
- Advance research to develop and identify highly effective reform models for secondary schools at risk of being left behind.

All told, the bill could be worth as much as \$2.5 billion per year for high schools.

According to former Gov. **Bob Wise**, AEE president, the bill would finance policies that have effectively increased high school graduation rates.

"We know what can and should be done to end the dropout crisis in this country," Wise said. "These Senators have shown the will; their legislation shows the way."