

Kids returning to school, many without Common Core results

September 6 2015, by Jennifer C. Kerr

No more sleeping in.

With new backpacks, pens and pencils and clothes, millions of children are back in school or heading there after summer vacation. Many are excited, some are anxious—and still waiting for the results of the new tests they took last spring aligned to the Common Core academic standards.

Congress returns from its summer vacation after Labor Day and on its agenda is a rewrite to the No Child Left Behind education law that requires the annual academic testing. The House and Senate passed competing versions, and congressional negotiators need to reconcile them.

Some things to know as [students](#), parents and teachers embark on a new school year.

ENROLLMENT

About 50.1 million students will attend public elementary and [secondary schools](#) this fall. Enrollment is expected to be slightly higher than a year ago, when 50 million students were enrolled in public schools, according to the Department of Education.

An additional 4.9 million students are expected to attend private schools this fall.

The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that 3.3 million students will graduate from high schools, public and private, at the end of the school year.

In all, about \$634 billion will be spent in the 2015-2016 school year for public elementary and secondary schools. Costs include salaries for school personnel, benefits, student transportation, books and energy costs. The cost per student is projected at \$12,605 for the current school year.

Enrollment is also growing at the nation's colleges and universities, with 7 million students at two-year colleges and 13.2 million at four-year schools, according to center.

It says colleges and universities are expected to award 952,000 associate's degrees, 1.8 million bachelor's degrees, 802,000 master's degrees and 179,000 doctor's degrees in 2015-16.

COMMON CORE TESTS

This past spring saw the rollout of new tests based on the Common Core standards. The reading and math tests replace traditional spring [standardized tests](#). About 12 million students in 29 states and the District of Columbia took the tests developed by two groups—the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

According to Smarter Balanced, only a few states have released scores

from the spring—Connecticut, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Missouri, West Virginia, and Vermont. Most states have not been able to put out [test scores](#) before the start of classes. The delay was expected in the exam's first year, but it's still frustrating for some teachers and parents.

Scores for the almost 5 million students who took the PARCC tests still have yet to be released. PAARC is still setting benchmarks for each performance level. The partnership says they're due for release this fall, and that the goal in future years of the tests is to release the results as close to the end of the school year as possible.

AMERICA'S TAKE ON STANDARDIZED TESTS

Many in the country question the idea of rating a teacher based partly on how students perform on standardized tests—something supported and encouraged by the Education Department as part of the No Child Left Behind education law.

A recent Gallup Poll found 55 percent of those questioned opposed linking teacher evaluations to their students' test scores. Among those with children in public schools, opposition was stronger, at 63 percent.

More than 40 states are moving forward with plans to evaluate teachers and principals in part on how well their students perform on standardized tests, according to the department. It says other factors, such as student work and parent feedback, should be considered, too. Teachers, unions and others worry there's too much emphasis on test scores.

The survey was funded by Phi Delta Kappa International, an association for educators that supports teachers and educational research.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND UPDATE

Congressional negotiators will have to iron out differences between House and Senate bills rewriting the much-criticized and outdated No Child Left Behind education law from 2002.

Both bills would maintain the annual testing requirements in reading and math in third grade through eighth grade, and once in high school. But they would allow the states to determine whether and how to use those tests to assess the performance of schools, teachers and students. The bills would bar the Education Department from mandating or giving states incentives to adopt or maintain specific academic standards, such as Common Core.

The biggest differences in the bills are school choice and funding.

The House measure would allow federal money to follow low-income children to public schools of their choice; under current law, those dollars remain at the struggling schools.

Democrats do not support the idea, and the Obama administration has made clear it won't back the House bill. The Senate rejected an attempt to add this change to its bill.

SLEEPY TEENS

Most teenagers aren't getting the kind of sleep they need as they begin a new school year.

Fewer than 1 in 5 middle and high schools began the day at the recommended 8:30 a.m. start time or later during the 2011-2012 school year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

CDC and Education Department researchers looked at nearly 40,000 public middle and high schools or combined schools, and found that the average start time for school was 8:03 a.m. Forty-two states reported that 75 percent to 100 percent of the [public schools](#) in their states started before 8:30 a.m.

Louisiana had the earliest average school start time, 7:40 a.m.; Alaska had the latest, 8:33 a.m. No schools in Hawaii, Mississippi and Wyoming started at 8:30 a.m. or later.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that middle and high schools start the day no earlier than 8:30 a.m., so teenagers get the sleep they need to be healthy and successful in [school](#).

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Citation: Kids returning to school, many without Common Core results (2015, September 6) retrieved 3 May 2024 from

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