



Working Draft of Suggested Legislation

THE EACH CHILD LEARNS ACT

The Pathway to 21st-Century Student-Centered Personalized and Digital Learning

Executive Summary

In order to meet the challenges of the modern world and the increasingly global economy, the U.S. education system must move to an innovative student-centered instruction model that will better prepare students for success. Momentum has been building in states around the nation to infuse digital learning with an enhanced use of technology in the schools in order to adopt this student-centered learning approach and transform the field of education. There is little question that technological applications show great promise to improve student outcomes—but technology alone is not enough. Achieving the true potential of digital learning requires great teachers, motivated students, interested parents and legal guardians, smart policies, and equal opportunities for access to technology for all students.

Bringing about meaningful change in education requires more than just adding technology or providing online learning options—it requires a comprehensive plan to modernize the nation’s schools. Simply replacing our textbooks with netbooks will not positively transform education; as states consider new legislative proposals they must take a comprehensive approach that considers all of the factors needed to move to a 21st-century learning model.

One of the challenges all states face is determining what policy changes are required as part of that comprehensive approach. For more than a year, the Alliance for Excellent Education has been examining what type of legislative proposals every state will need to consider in order to move to a modern education system. As part of that effort, the Alliance has been engaged in drafting suggested legislative language for a student-centered education approach that focuses on personalized student paths and digital learning.

The Alliance is now releasing the result of its efforts up to this point in the form of the “Each Child Learns Act,” a working draft of suggested personalized and digital learning legislation. In



the interest of integrating additional thoughts and recommendations, the Alliance is seeking public input to this draft during a 90-day comment period ending on November 1, 2012.

The Goals

The Alliance for Excellent Education’s comprehensive goal is to see that every child graduates from high school with the skills necessary to succeed in college, a career, and life. The Each Child Learns Act is a key step toward that goal. This working draft incorporates various educational strategies, including those from “10 Elements of High Quality Digital Learning,” a report released on December 1, 2010, by the Digital Learning Council, a nonpartisan organization cochaired by former Governor Jeb Bush and former Governor Bob Wise, the president of the Alliance. This draft reflects the Alliance’s independent views on effective ways to implement those goals through legislation. It is hoped that public comments will help clarify this working draft and ultimately make it a more valuable tool for policymakers and education professionals.

One of the comprehensive goals of the Each Child Learns Act is to ensure that every child graduates from high school with the skills necessary to succeed in college, a career, and life.

The Each Child Learns Act will help ensure that every child has access to a high-quality education that includes digital learning and the effective use of technology as an important component of personalizing and improving learning. The working draft of the suggested legislation provides comprehensive planning, language, guidance, and timelines for states to use as they make the transition to a forward-thinking and modern public education system. The Each Child Learns Act is based on the principle that a more personalized learning experience, driven by strong teaching in combination with the effective use of technology, should be the basis for any transition to a system that embraces high-quality digital learning.

Personalized Learning

Personalized learning is a student-centered approach to education. It focuses on each child as a distinct individual by offering enhanced opportunities for them to become more engaged and motivated to perform well in school and maximize their learning potential. Personalized learning allows each child to learn in their own style and at their own pace, in the way best suited for them individually to master, through demonstrated performance and competency, every academic unit and subject necessary for them to graduate from high school and succeed in college, a career, and life. This approach enables students who are quickly mastering course material to move on and be constantly challenged, while also allowing more time for other students in the same classroom to master a subject without falling behind.

Personalized learning can be a transformational way to modernize and improve schools—but it must be done right. Students moving at their own pace need to be accurately monitored through their course work and constantly assessed to gauge how much progress they have made and what they need to do to stay on track for successfully completing every subject.



Digital Learning and the Effective Use of Technology

High-quality digital learning and the effective use of technology offer a way to personalize learning that is not widely available in the current education model. Digital learning is any instructional practice that is effectively using technology to strengthen the student learning experience. Digital learning encompasses a wide spectrum of tools and practice, including using online and formative assessment, increasing focus and quality of teaching resources and time, online content and courses, applications of technology in the classroom and school building, adaptive software for students with special needs, learning platforms, participating in professional communities of practice, providing access to high-level and challenging content and instruction, and many other advancements technology provides to teaching and learning.

In an antiquated learning system that allows little flexibility in time or technique, teachers currently have limited ability during class to devote much personal attention to each student. Educational technology, including real-time data from digital formative assessments and other strategies, can provide the valuable tools teachers need to monitor each of their students' individual progress on a daily basis.

Technological tools can make possible what was once impossible. Teachers now have the opportunity to be more effective in their instruction through blended learning and other innovative models. The Alliance is focused on making sure technology and blended learning are being used effectively to support teachers as their roles change in this changing culture shift in education. Digital tools enable education paths for each student to be designed while allowing classroom teachers the time and flexibility to focus on all students to guide them through the learning process—not just a select few students or the class as a uniform whole.

The world of digital learning is expanding beyond merely offering students the chance to take classes online. While online learning is still an important part of digital learning, blended learning instruction models offer new opportunities to improve student outcomes in traditional public school settings across the country. Blended learning fuses the positive aspects of the most common current classroom experience provided by great teachers with enhanced technology, new innovative learning practices, and increased personal attention for each student. It offers a new model to help turn around the nation's schools, particularly those that are performing poorly.

The Structure

The Each Child Learns Act is divided into four articles.

Article I provides an overall summary, general guidelines, and legislative intent to improve public schools and raise student achievement.

The Four Articles of the Each Child Learns Act

- I. Summary and Guiding Principles
- II. Personalized Learning for Each Child
- III. Transformation to 21st-Century Digital Learning
- IV. Uniform Definitions for Personalized and Digital Learning



Article II focuses on comprehensive strategy and presents important key policy items that must be in place to personalize learning, such as

- transitioning to competency-based learning and eliminating “seat time” requirements;
- utilizing formative assessments delivered by technology to track student progress;
- providing teachers with enhanced continuing education and mentoring opportunities through the use of technology; and
- establishing a mechanism to track student data so each child can be on a personalized learning path.

Article III deals with the actual mechanics of digital learning and the specific technology policies required to install it successfully. These include

- helping all public schools to allow blended learning and other technology-enhanced instruction models;
- offering high-quality online classes for students—particularly ones who need credit-recovery assistance or have special situations;
- writing strong policy safeguards into the law to carefully monitor the quality and accountability of providers; and
- increasing opportunities for access to internet devices and required technology infrastructure such as high-speed broadband connections.

Article IV provides uniform definitions and terms related to personalized and digital learning that are either part of the draft legislation or will be important to the process after the legislation is enacted and new policies are implemented.

The Each Child Learns Act recognizes that every state has different educational needs, and therefore provides language that is adaptable and applicable to most, if not all, states. Throughout the legislation, there are sections that include two different options so states can choose which is most appropriate for their situation. (For example, the decision is left to the state to designate the appropriate agency or officials to implement the policies established in the legislation.) Certain sections contain editorial comments that offer additional perspective, advice, and information. These comments are located directly following the sections they refer to; they are indicated by the word ***COMMENT***, which appears in blue and bolded italics above the text itself.

The ultimate goal of the Each Child Learns Act is plainly stated in the title: Every child should have the opportunity to learn the subject matter they need to succeed in life in a manner that maximizes their learning abilities. The legislation offers all students a jump start on the opportunity to succeed in a personalized learning model that is driven by great teaching and enhanced by the effective use of technology.



Key Policy Components

Contained within the working draft are nine main elements that are crucial to providing a personalized and high-quality digital learning opportunity for each student. These elements are found in Articles II and III of the draft legislation and include

- development of comprehensive strategy (Article II, Part 2);
- competency-based learning (Article II, Part 3);
- transformation to digital summative and formative assessments (Article II, Part 4);
- personalized learning paths (Article II, Part 5);
- effective teaching in the 21st century (Article II, Part 6);
- transitioning to 21st-century learning models and instruction (Article III, Part 2);
- online learning opportunities through creation of the “Statewide Online Learning Network” (Article III, Part 3);
- oversight of the Statewide Online Learning Network (Article III, Part 4); and
- developing infrastructure and shifting to digital content (Article III, Part 5).

Great teaching combined with digital learning and the effective use of technology is the foundation necessary to personalize learning for each child. Transforming to a system driven by high-quality digital learning provides the best opportunity to transform the public school system to meet the demands of the 21st century, by increasing high-quality learning options for every student, maximizing the role of teachers, and providing a more cost-effective yet improved high-quality learning experience for every student.

Personalized learning and digital learning, as part of an overall strategic effort, must be combined to act as one coherent teaching and learning approach, since neither strategy will be effective without the other. States must consider the implementation of both strategies and other smart systemic reforms as they begin the process of revising laws and policies. Personalizing learning for each student becomes much more difficult without the benefit of technology to streamline the process. Likewise, if digital learning is not personalized and of high quality, there is no reason to have it.

Opportunity for Public to Submit Comments and Thoughts

In the interest of integrating additional thoughts and recommendations, the Alliance for Excellent Education is seeking public input on this draft. Whether you are a teacher or a student, a parent or a policymaker, or an interested citizen who cares about improving education, please submit your thoughts on this working draft. As the Alliance moves toward finalizing the final legislation in future months, it will consider advice and suggestions received during this comment period.

Please submit comments to legislation@all4ed.org by November 1, 2012.

This working draft of the Each Child Learns Act was prepared by Stuart M. “Chip” Slaven, Esq., senior advocacy associate at the Alliance for Excellent Education.