



Whiteboard
Advisors

*Education Insider: Tracking Measures,
Common Core, Sec. Duncan Job
Approval Ratings, and Federal Policy &
Programs*
July-August 2014

Why *Education Insider*?

We harness the wisdom of well-connected influentials to provide insights and predict policy outcomes for stakeholders in the education debate.

The Value

Whiteboard Advisors is a policy-oriented consulting practice. We provide proprietary research and strategic support to investors, philanthropic donors, nonprofit leaders, and entrepreneurs who seek unparalleled understanding of the education policy and business environments.

Education Insider helps those who need quality information to make high-stakes decisions about the direction of federal policy. *Education Insider* combines the wisdom of informed crowds with expert analysis to offer unparalleled information, analysis, and forecasting on a range of federal education policy issues and likely outcomes.

Education Insider conducts an anonymous survey of a **small group of key education influentials** (policymakers, thought leaders, and association heads) to get their thoughts and commentary about the context of the current debate and possible outcomes. This helps surface the underlying dynamics that can affect the trajectory of policies, positively or negatively, and go deeper than the conventional wisdom and rhetoric.

Why *Education Insider*?



The Process

Education Insider is a monthly report that uses a proprietary model to cut through the noise and provide real-time insights on national education policy trends, debates, and issues—from a small group of approximately 50-75 Insiders who are close to the process. We conduct a survey of these influencers, which includes their candid opinions and insights, to provide a unique perspective on K-12 and higher education. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of Whiteboard Advisors or any of its employees.

Who Are the Insiders?

Influential leaders who are shaping federal education reform, including individuals who have served or are currently serving as key policy and political “insiders,” such as:

- Current and former White House and U.S. Department of Education leaders;
- Current and former Congressional staff;
- State education leaders, including state school chiefs and former governors; and
- Leaders of major education organizations and think tanks, as well as other key influentials.

Executive Summary

- **86%** of Insiders disapprove of how Congress is handling education; **64%** disapprove of the Administration's handling of education.
 - **74%** of Insiders think that ESEA will not be reauthorized until after December 2015; **20%** think it will never be reauthorized.
 - **53%** of Insiders think that the PARCC Common Core assessment consortium is on the right track; **59%** think that SBAC is.
 - **21%** of Insiders think the new 50-state teacher equity strategy will have a greater impact than past federal efforts.
- When given an updated set of options regarding the timing of Higher Education Act reauthorization, 32% of Insiders believe it may be by December 2015.
 - Unlike most education issues, debate over Common Core Standards has taken on national political significance. Most Insiders think that Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal's stance on the Common Core is motivated by politics rather than substantive concerns about the standards. Insiders also believe that if Louisiana pulls out of Common Core, it will have significant national implications.
 - Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's policies remain controversial. Less than half of Insiders approve of the job Sec. Duncan is doing but give him better marks on higher education than elementary and secondary policy. Duncan earned a higher job approval rating than the Administration overall, and both Duncan and the Administration rate higher than Congress.
 - Insiders selected Gainful Employment regulations as the policy shift with the greatest impact on the future of higher education.

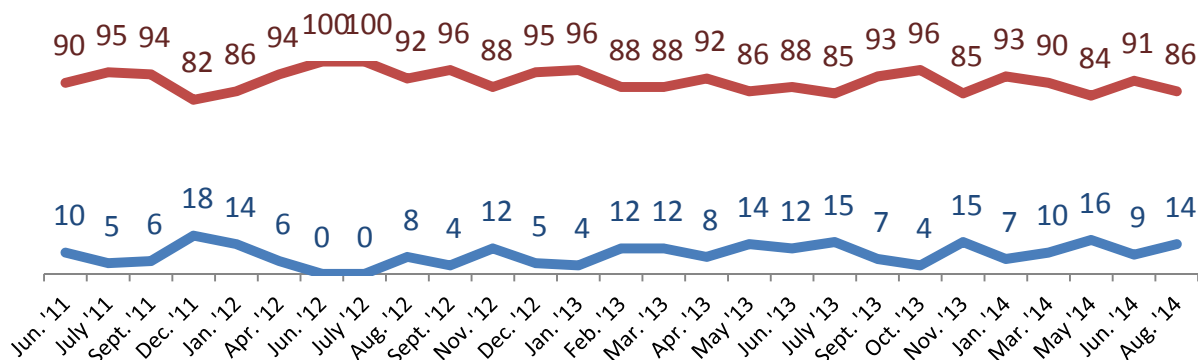
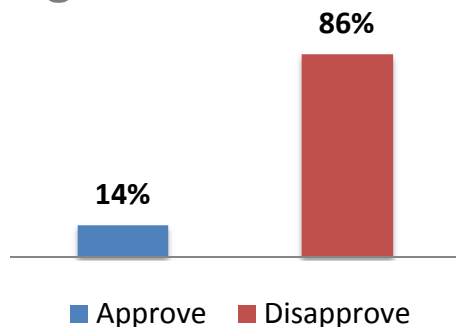
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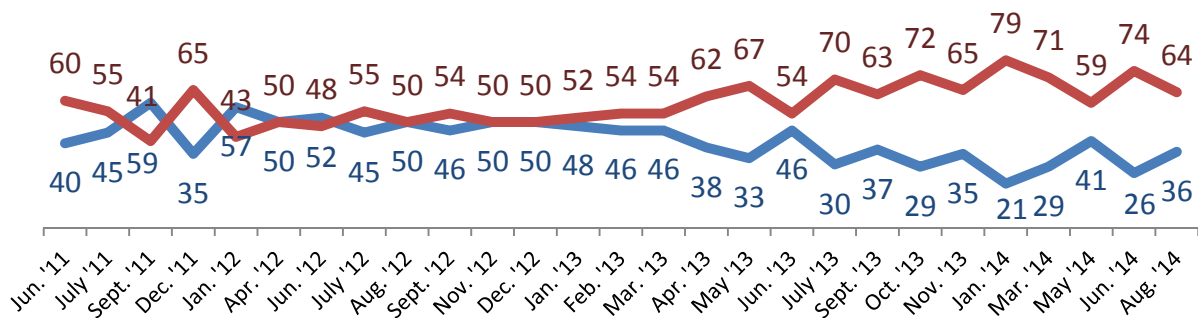
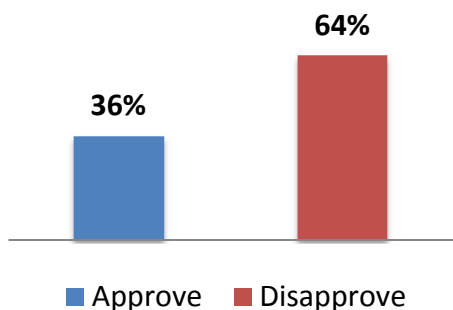
Approval Rates for Congress and Administration Both Up Slightly

Job Approval on Education

Congress



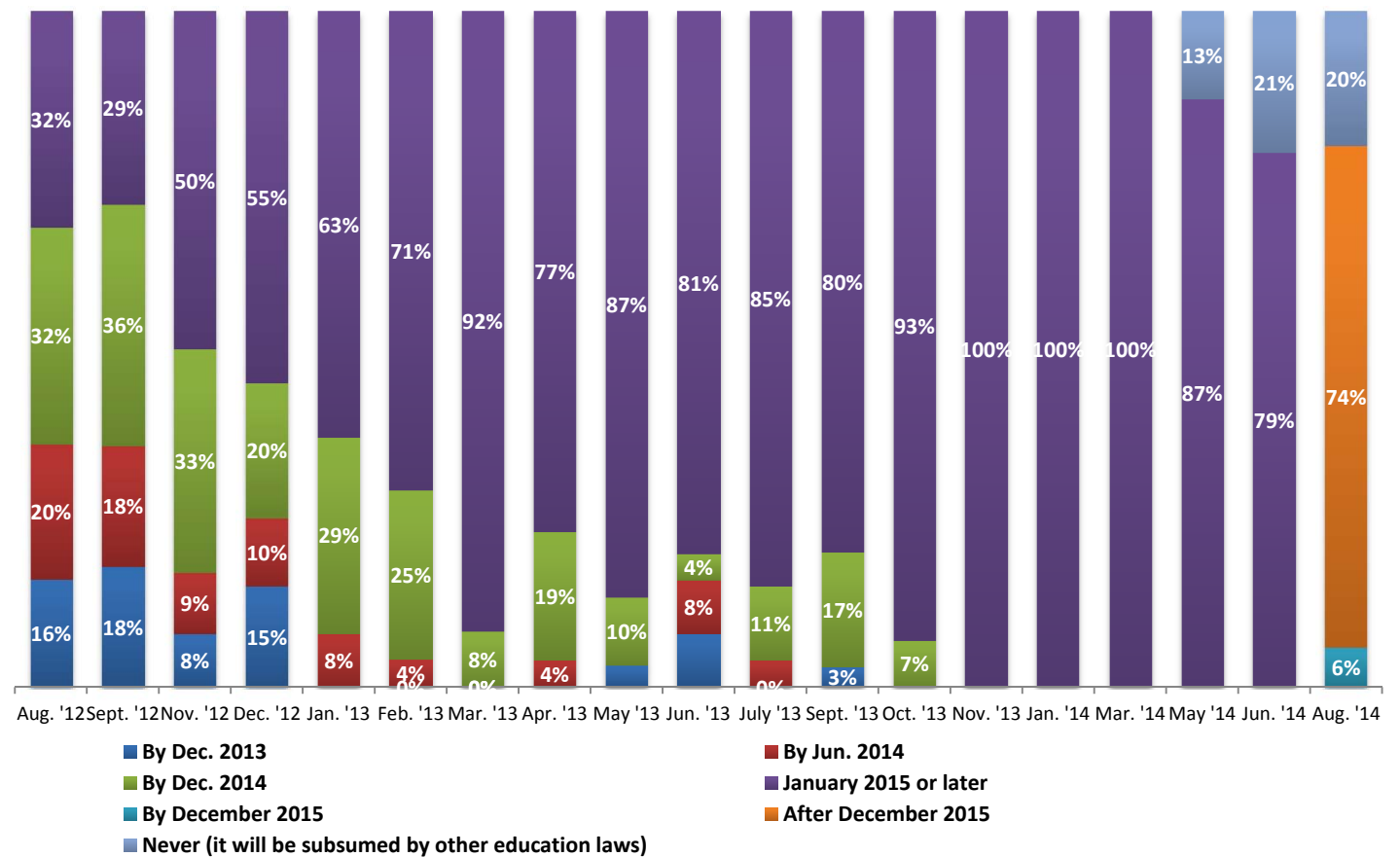
Administration



Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress/the Administration is handling education?

Timing of ESEA Reauthorization

Insiders were given a new range of options for ESEA timing, looking beyond next year. 20% believe ESEA will never be reauthorized, and 74% say it will not be until after December 2015. Only 6% think it will be reauthorized before then.



Question: About when do you believe a final ESEA bill will be signed into law?

Insider Insight: ESEA Reauthorization Timing

Comments from Insiders:

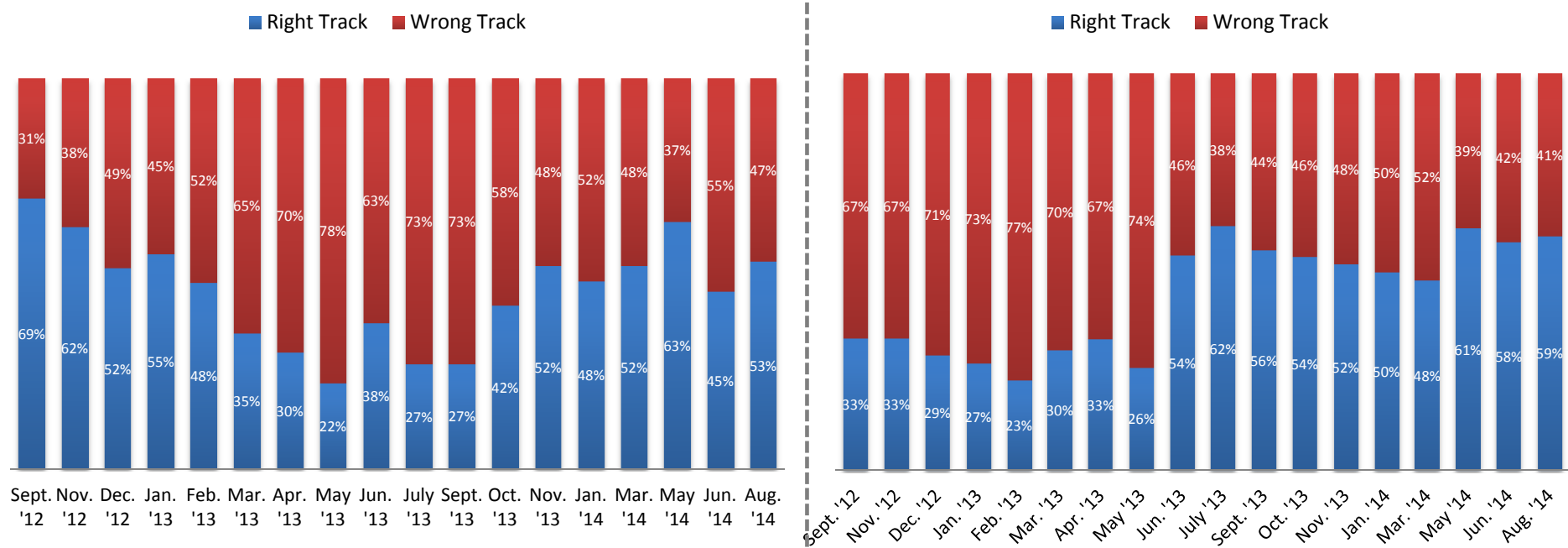
- “Divided government seems likely to continue through at least 2016, possibly long after.”
- “[It’s] looking like the Republicans may take the Senate, and something like the Alexander bill could get enough Dems and still pass the House. Could be a good way for them to start the new Congress.”
- “The last few bills passed by the House/Congress show that bipartisan agreement on education issues is at least possible.”
- “We are only six years behind. What’s the rush now?”
- “Unless a lawsuit or significant problem with ESEA waivers arise, I think reauthorization will get shifted to the next Administration who will be less beholden to the waivers.”
- “Chairman Alexander and Chairman Kline will get the bill done by [next] summer and sent to Obama by fall. He’ll sign it and then promptly ignore it like he does all laws.”
- “White House has not made this a priority. The Administration could have a win here if they wanted it. They don’t.”

Common Core Assessments—Right Track or Wrong Track?

Are the assessment consortia on the right track or wrong track?

PARCC

SBAC



Question: Are the assessment consortia on the right track or wrong track?

Insider Insight: Right Track / Wrong Track

Comments from Insiders:

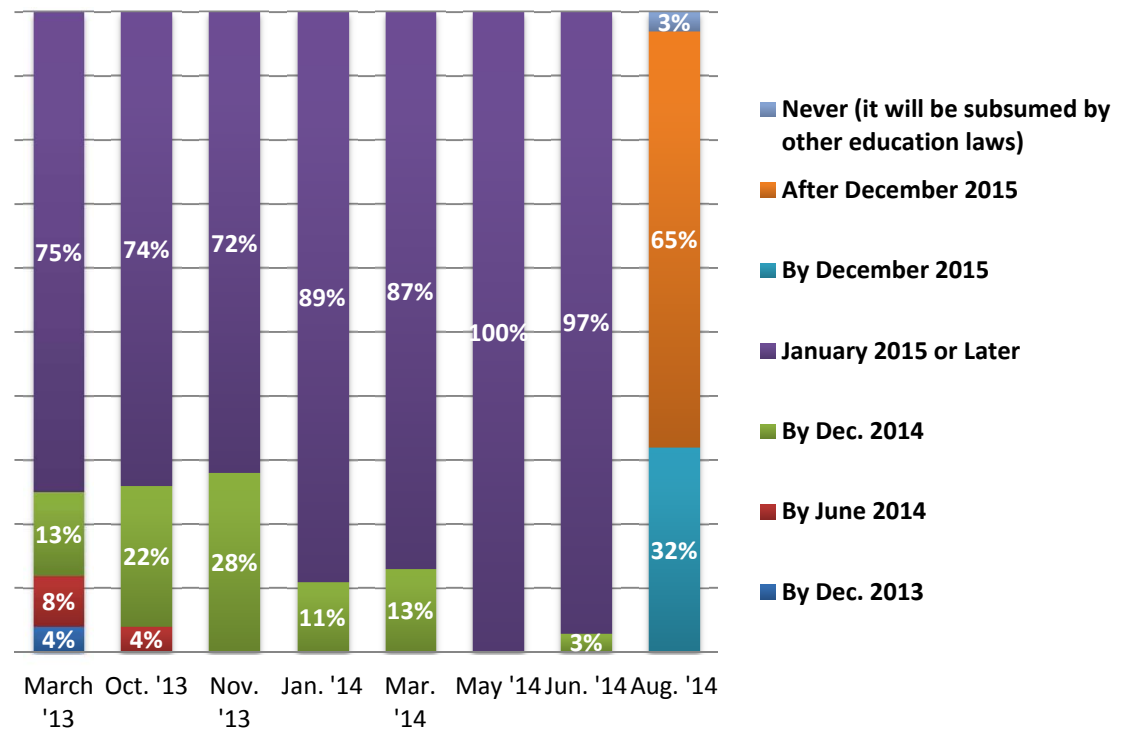
- “All accounts are that they will have a test and it will be good. Now there just need to be states in it to take the test...”
- “Successful field tests, and everything seems to be going well from a development standpoint, as long as PARCC keeps enough states.”
- “Hess is right. Common Core and common assessments are going down in the history books as a cautionary tale of the federal gov’s intrusive role in K12.”
- “Both have failed to engage parents and educators. As a result, neither is trusted.”
- “The consortia are plowing ahead despite several political setbacks.”
- “Field testing went better than expected.”
- “[Wrong track,] because states are exiting en masse and the consortia, despite years of warnings [that] the RTTT assessment money wouldn’t be replenished, [have] no clue where they’ll find their next handout to continue their existence.”
- “Some of the things [I’m] hearing out of the states/schools that participated in pilot are not encouraging.”
- “[You] need to add a question about the other assessments states are using like ACT, AIR, and Pearson. The ‘common’ assessments are fragmenting. Rapidly.”
- “I think the assessment consortia are OK but a lot of states aren’t!”

Higher Education Act

Insiders were also given a new range of options for HEA timing, adding future dates and including “never” as a choice.

None of the Insiders think that HEA will be reauthorized by this December, but 32% think it may be by December 2015. The majority think it will be reauthorized after December 2015.

Timing of HEA Reauthorization

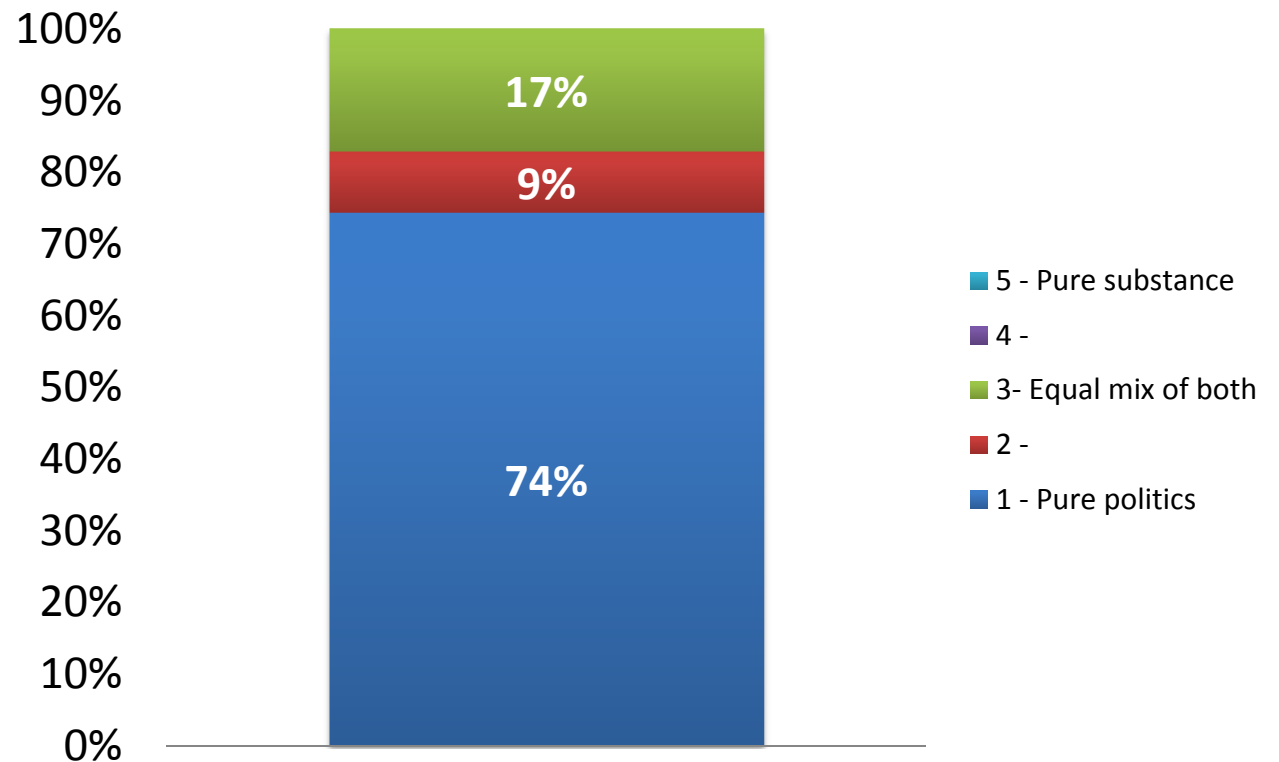


Question: By about when do you believe a final Higher Education Act (HEA) bill will be signed into law?

Gov. Jindal and the Common Core – Politics or Substance?

Unlike many other education issues, Common Core is turning into a mainstream political issue and factoring into the political calculus of 2014 and potential 2016 candidates. When asked, most Insiders think that Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's stance on the Common Core is politically motivated.

On a scale of 1 to 5, is Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's Common Core position motivated by politics or substance?



Question: On a scale of 1 to 5, is Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's Common Core position motivated by politics or substance?

Insider Insight: Gov. Jindal and the Common Core – Politics or Substance?

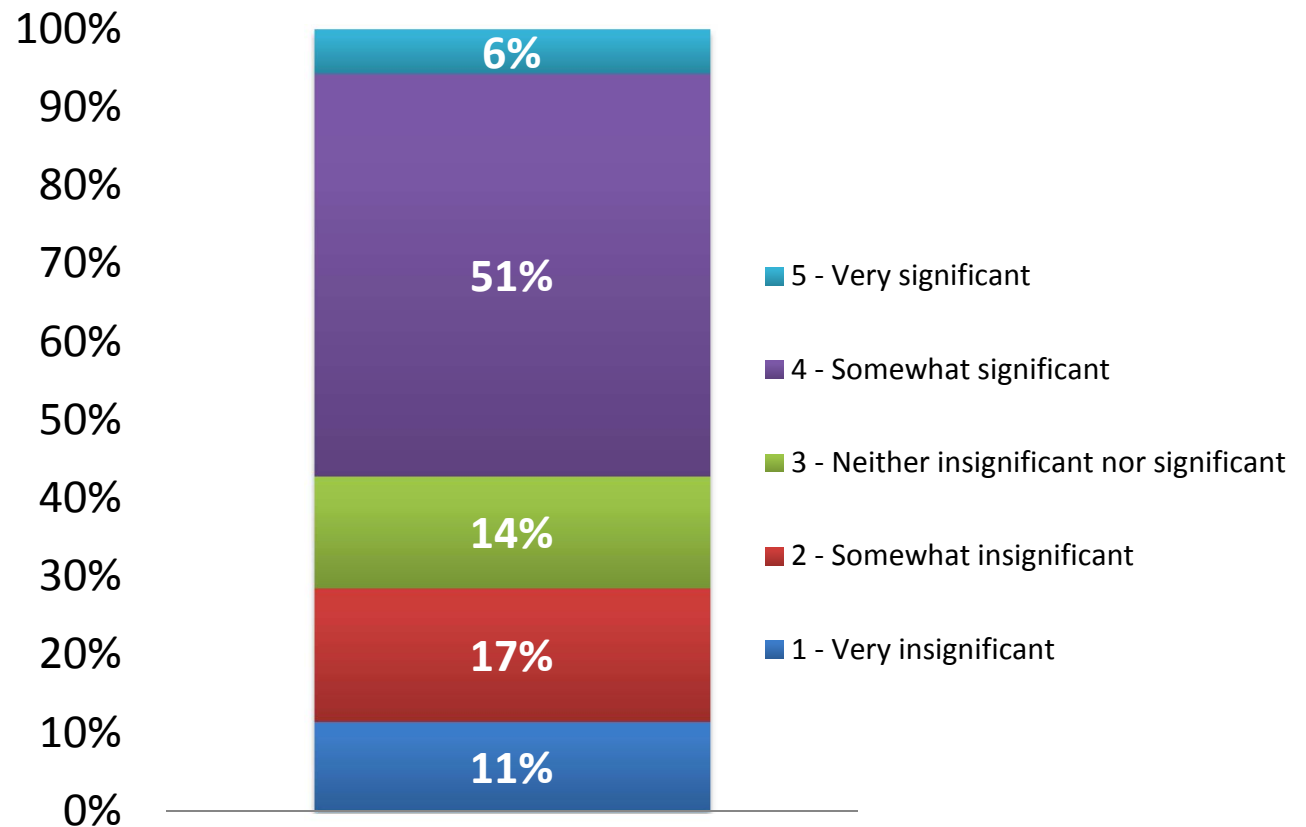
Comments from Insiders:

- “This is so obviously politics I don’t know how anyone could think otherwise.”
- “The race among 2016 hopefuls [who are] not named Jeb Bush to put distance between themselves and Common Core is in high gear now - total politics but the political logic is clear.”
- “[The] most obviously political of all the anti-Common Core action recently.”
- “It is hard to see how it could be anything else.”
- “Definitely political motives, but you can’t overlook how clearly this is becoming a substantive nightmare, too. It’s not like Jindal is the only Governor rethinking this mess.”
- “I’m so sick and tired of all of these DC-based, self-styled political analysts going on and on about Jindal’s presidential aspirations. No. Common Core’s toxicity is inversely related to a state’s proximity to the Canadian border, meaning it’s like a gallon-jug of cobra venom in Louisiana. By hating on CCSS, Jindal’s being a good Governor.”
- “Another example of a politician being for it before he was against it. Too bad voters don’t cast votes for President based on education positions.”
- “Common Core is not a political winner. Name a single education group that has praised, released a statement or press release, or raised funds for a Governor that fought back anti-Common Core legislation. Not a single one. And the funder community is making this worse by only engaging center-left advocates and communications companies that have little to no understanding of how to make this a winner for conservatives.”
- “Craven, hypocritical.”

What Would the Impact of Louisiana's Withdrawal Be?

The majority of the Insiders think Louisiana's withdrawal from the Common Core would be significant.

If Gov. Jindal succeeds in pulling Louisiana out of the Common Core, how significant is it?



Question: If Gov. Jindal succeeds in pulling Louisiana out of the Common Core, how significant is it?

Insider Insight: What Would the Impact of Louisiana's Withdrawal Be?

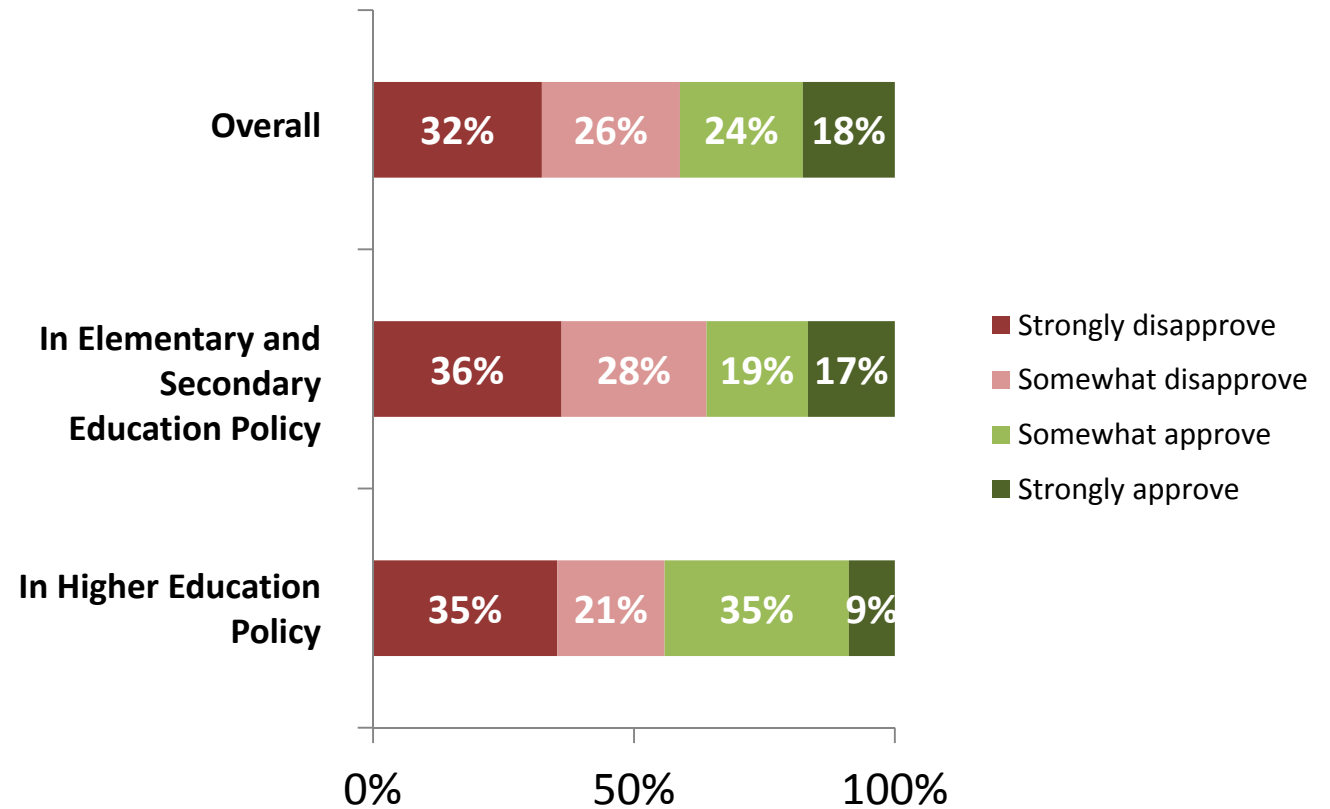
Comments from Insiders:

- “This would up the ante even more for the others vying for 2016 so it’s significant.”
- “Just like every other state that has pulled out of Common Core, the standards will be close enough to not disrupt classroom instruction. The political ramifications are greater, particularly when it comes to the disagreement between Jindal and reform golden boy John White.”
- “It’s very significant for the students of Louisiana.”
- “Louisiana is considered a leading reform state. For the governor to reverse course and use it as an election year chit, shows how vulnerable Common Core can be, despite its substantive appeal.”
- “Very significant for students in Louisiana who will not have the same opportunities as kids in states that have adopted Common Core. Not terribly significant in terms of further damaging Common Core. Anyone running for President is running for President full-time and this is just part of his campaign/fundraising operation.”
- “A demonstration, like IN, that it can be done, emboldens others to take the same step.”
- “Nationally, somewhat significant. Could have major impact [in] derailing other work underway in Louisiana, however.”

Job Approval Ratings for Education Secretary Arne Duncan

Overall, job approval ratings for Sec. Duncan are under 50%.

42% of Insiders approve of Sec. Duncan's job performance overall. 44% approve of his performance in higher ed, while 36% approve of his efforts related to K-12 policy.



Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Arne Duncan is handling his job as Secretary of Education?

Insider Insight: Job Approval Ratings for Education Secretary Arne Duncan

Comments from Insiders:

- “K-12 education policy around the country is in disarray. Duncan is not making any links between the importance of a high quality education, how vital it is to a strong nation and to the policies his department has been pursuing. Their higher education approach appears more coherent, and while I don’t believe they will be able to pull off the rating systems - other policies are promoting change and innovation.”
- “[It’s an] impossible job these days.”
- “K-12 is a total mess under his watch, there is no coherence to federal policy now and not even a clear through line about what they’re trying to do. On higher ed it makes more sense but all the usual political and congressional issues are still getting in the way.”
- “Duncan has made a shambles of Federal K-12 policy.”
- “So long as Secretary Duncan keeps mirroring Congressional action on key issues, he will remove any incentive to legislate.”
- “2017 can’t come soon enough.”
- “Arne's time in the sun is gone. Now he equally irritates Democrats and Republicans. He says one thing and his staff do another.”

Insider Insight: Job Approval Ratings for Education Secretary Arne Duncan

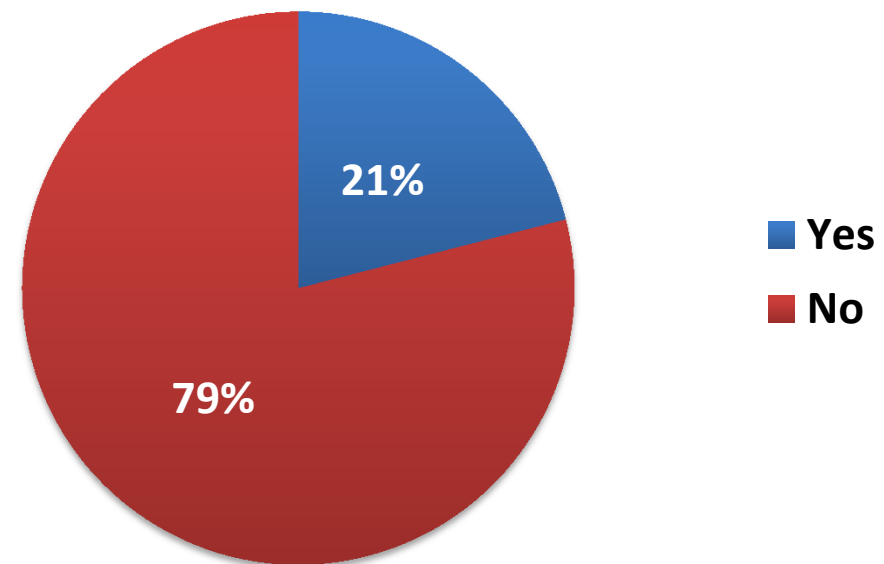
Comments from Insiders:

- “Arne may not have coerced states to adopt Common Core, but he will be responsible for their downfall by pushing an overly aggressive teacher eval agenda linked to the assessments.”
- “Duncan remains basically a pragmatic but ambitious policy leader. He has already made his biggest moves, especially in K-12. He is not a brilliant regulator or administrator. He is also not any more able to succeed in the current congressional climate than anyone else. For these reasons, late in his term, he appears more middling than he is. Forgotten is the fact that NCLB had exhausted its force for change between 2006 and 2008. Forgotten, too, is the amount of change Duncan made between 2009 and 2010. Some of it was willy-nilly and/or over ambitious, but it made change. The field is very different than when Duncan entered the office. The real challenge for the department is to resist the temptation to do more. The field, now different, needs to regroup and figure out how it will do its work differently. Under NCLB this was accomplished by 2005 or 2006. The difference was negligible. Duncan’s changes will still be resounding in the field well past 2018 as states and districts continue to figure out the right way to braid together the many threads of reform he introduced in 2009.”
- “What is Arne doing? What policies are happening? Other than taking out Corinthian Colleges, is there even a game plan?”

New Teacher Equity Strategy

The Department of Education recently unveiled a 50-state teacher equity strategy, which will include technical assistance for states and the publication of state educator equity profiles. Almost 80% of Insiders do not think that this new strategy will have any more impact on the equitable distribution of teachers than past federal efforts.

Will the new teacher equity strategy effort have any more impact on the equitable distribution of teachers than past federal efforts?



Question: The Department of Education recently unveiled a 50-state teacher equity strategy, which will include technical assistance for states and the publication of state educator equity profiles. Will this effort have any more impact on the equitable distribution of teachers than past federal efforts?

Insider Insights: New Teacher Equity Strategy

Comments from Insiders:

- “I said no, not because I don’t think it’s a good policy idea but because improvement here fundamentally involves disrupting the state level iron triangles that prevent innovation in this area. The feds can help with that in some conditional ways but its ultimately a state function and has to happen there.”
- “This will accomplish nothing. Were I an Ed Week editor, my only challenge in reviewing an article on this subject would be deciding whether to use ‘gauzy’ or ‘pabulum’ in the title.”
- “It’s too early to know. It depends on the approach they take to supporting states and districts in making the shifts needed to create equitable distribution.”
- “Good idea, but likely lacks the funding needed to have true impact.”
- “Some. This raises the issue and the profile again, but without real teeth for enforcement or consequences for inaction, it won’t do much more than force states to think and write a plan.”
- “Not clear whether it will make much difference but I’d rather see them try and fail than not try. This is a real problem—I wish they had focused on it earlier when they had more ‘juice’ but better late than not at all.”

Insider Insights: New Teacher Equity Strategy

Comments from Insiders:

- “The very premise of the equitable distribution of teachers is off as a way to help students living in poverty. While good teachers absolutely matter, at the end of the day, access to a high-quality curriculum, high-quality instructional materials, common planning time for teachers, and robust teacher mentoring programs for new teachers all would likely have a much greater impact on kids living in poverty than this equity strategy—which seems to be yet another federal reporting requirement that will have little to no impact on students. The ‘strategy’ seems to ignore: 1) the real challenges of teaching kids living in poverty, 2) the challenges of recruiting teachers to teach in high-poverty urban and rural areas as well as high teacher turnover rates in those areas, 3) that a teacher that is effective in one setting may not be in another, and 4) that a teacher that appears to be effective in a wealthy setting may actually not be, but their lack of effectiveness can be masked because wealthy parents can provide their children with additional outside resources to make up for a weak teacher. It seems like a lot of political capital (at the federal, state, and local level) is going to be taken up by this strategy without a lot of results for students. Again.”
- “Well, the bar is so low as to be on the ground, so there’s a chance to help states and make a difference.”

Insider Insights: New Teacher Equity Strategy

Comments from Insiders:

- “If, by ‘impact,’ you mean the department will find more self-discovered authority to enforce some off-the-wall reading of statute that Congress never intended and then abuse that enforcement authority on states until they carry out some compliance driven outcome that still doesn’t address the underlying problem, then yeah, it will be pretty impactful by that standard.”
- “Another huge overreach that will be largely ignored and stopped by the next Congress.”
- “It will be very limited at first, but it will shift the discussion, at least in some leading states, away from minimal qualifications to advanced qualifications and outcomes for students. Bravo!”
- “No, which is too bad. This is a real issue.”
- “Pie in the sky.”

Insiders Weigh In on Higher Education Policy Initiatives

Of the most recent Obama Administration higher ed proposals, 55% of Insiders think that the proposed Gainful Employment regulations will have the most significant impact on the future of higher education.

Top Answers

1

Proposed Gainful Employment regulations

2

U.S. Department of Education's decision to cut off funds to Corinthian Colleges Inc., leading the company to sell most of its colleges and close down the remaining campuses.

3

Change from a two-year to three-year default rate.*

Annual change in student-loan interest rates.*

Question: There have been a number of big shifts in higher ed policy in the last year. Please rank the following, from most significant impact on the future of higher ed, to least, where 1 = the most significant impact.

Insiders Weigh In on Higher Education Policy Initiatives

Top Answers

Insiders think that year-round Pell Grants are the most likely to be signed into law, followed by permitting students to use older tax data when they apply for financial aid.

1

Revive year-round Pell Grants, with some modifications.

2

Permit students to use older (2-year old vs. 1-year old at present) tax data when they apply for financial aid, which some argue would let students apply for and get notified about financial aid earlier.

3

Limit the amount of money that for-profit colleges can receive from the Federal Government to 85% of their revenue (down from 90%), and count military tuition-assistance/veterans benefits, not just federal financial aid, as part of this 85% limit.

4

Create a universal Net Price Calculator to allow students to easily compare college costs.

5

Require the Secretary of Education to publish cohort default rates for Graduate and Parent PLUS loan borrowers.

Question: Recently, there have been a number of Higher Education Act Reauthorization proposals – on a scale of 1 to 5, rank them from most likely to be signed into law, where 1 = most likely to be signed.

Insider Insights: Higher Education Act Reauthorization Proposals

Comments from Insiders:

- “Prior-prior year seems to be the consensus now. Never underestimate the ability of Congress to snatch disagreement from the jaws of consensus, of course. But it seems like this is a bipartisan, common sense change that will get passed.”
- “Year-round Pell is an awesome idea since the Pell program is now on a firm financial foundation for years to come, and besides, the federal government has large surpluses that it can use to cover any excess Pell costs. Oh, wait....”
- “Real answer is ‘none of the above’ anytime soon.”

Insider Insights: What Didn't Make it Into These Proposals That Might Have a Chance of Going Somewhere?

Comments from Insiders:

- “Reforms to income-based repayment and caps on PLUS Loans will be discussed.”
- “I believe there will be additional simplification of the student aid process.”
- “Streamlining repayment options (one grant, one loan, one tax credit).”
- “Shifting some policies to focus on outcomes and completion.”
- “Better Data.”

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