

# Why the New Education Law Is a Game-Changer

***No Child Left Behind's replacement focuses as never before on investing in what works.***

BY: [John Bridgeland](#), [Peter Orszag](#) | January 21, 2016

As Congress reformed the No Child Left Behind law in December, much attention was paid to the additional responsibilities the new law gives the states and to its reduction in the burden of over-testing of students. What is not well known is that the Every Student Succeeds Act could shift more than \$2 billion of federal funds annually over the next four years toward building evidence on what works in education. It also invests in proven efforts that give America's students greater odds of developing, learning and graduating from high school ready to succeed. This all may sound like common sense, but it is actually quite rare in public policy. And we think it is a game-changer for education.

Remember "Moneyball"? The book and film depicted how Billy Beane, the legendary general manager of the Oakland A's, forever changed baseball by using data and statistics to overcome a financial disadvantage and develop winning teams. The new education law takes a Moneyball approach to helping students and schools get better outcomes. The overwhelming bipartisan support for the new law is a powerful validation of its emphasis on investing in what works.

The Every Student Succeeds Act creates an innovation fund to test, validate, replicate and scale evidence-based solutions to solve the big challenges students and schools face, and it allows school districts to invest their federal dropout prevention and student safety and health funds in "pay for success" initiatives in which districts pay for student services only if and when specified results are achieved.

The law keeps America on its march toward a 90 percent high school graduation rate by 2020 through effective use of data and accountability. States, districts and schools must continue to calculate four-year graduation rates in the same manner across the country and break down that data by race, ethnicity, income, disability, English language learners and homeless students so that we can see how much progress is being made and the social-equity challenges that remain.

More importantly, though, the law provides a pathway to success by bolstering the use of evidence-based interventions -- rather than guesses, hunches or flashy programs -- with a goal of improving student outcomes in the lowest-performing high schools where one-third or more of the nation's students are dropping out. Where such evidence and pressure have been applied, significant progress has been made. In the last dozen years, the nation has seen a 10-percentage-point gain in graduation rates, with nearly two million more students completing high school.

If implemented well, we should see significant results from the federal government's new Moneyball approach to elementary and secondary education. To be sure, the proof will come when local innovation and investing in what works yields results -- better reading and math scores, safer schools, fewer expulsions and dropouts, higher graduation rates, and more students prepared for college and employment. This prospect is what excites us as former White House officials. Despite annual education expenditures that rival other developed nations, our students lag behind in basic skills. It is time to turn things around by focusing on what works.

This new law is known for many things, but what we find groundbreaking is that such a major piece of federal legislation includes *so many* evidence-based provisions, driven by the leadership of a president and Congress often at odds with one another. We believe this unusual alignment has to become the new norm, and we hope it paves the way for other bipartisan legislation to help improve outcomes for children, families and communities.

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