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Sent time: Friday, December 02, 2011 9:17:29 AM
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Subject: FW: 12-1-11 Education Round-Up

FYI – have a great day!

Sincerely,

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From: Higgins, Deborah
Sent: Thursday, December 01, 2011 9:54 AM
Subject: 12-1-11 Education Round-Up



Hoping by the end of today the newspaper clips site is up and running. Best, Deborah

Today's News:

St. Pete Times: Students from Hillsborough's alternative schools describe challenges, successes

WCTV-TV: Health Matters in Leon County Schools

Ft. Myers News Press: Outsider is wanted in interim at Edison State

Naples Daily News: Edison trustees hope students, faculty rally behind acting president after Walker's departure

Ft. Myers News Press: Editorial: Walker's suspension sad event

St. Pete Times: Editorial: Put lawmakers' record on education to test

The Jacksonville Examiner: Supreme Court to weigh-in on lawsuit by Duval students/parents against state

Sarasota Herald Tribune: SCF president's contract is questioned

Associated Press: Police investigate another FAMU student's death for possible hazing connection

New York Times: Districts Pay Less in Poor Schools, Report Says

Miami Herald: Miami-Dade teachers union may have to revote on contract

Education Week: Experts Say Social Sciences Are 'Left Behind'

Wall Street Journal: Teacher Faction Expands to L.A.

Lakeland Ledger: Scott Wants to Ensure Funds Available for Independent USF Poly

Education Week: Middle Schoolers Getting Prepped for College

Gainesville Sun: Alachua eSchool coming to a screen near you

Education Week: Teacher Beat Blog: States' ESEA Waiver Bids Murky on Teacher Evaluations

- Education Next: The Future of Educational Accountability, As Envisioned by 11 Leading States
- Education Next: The Nation's Online Learning Omission
- St. Pete Times: Pinellas school tax proponents prepare for 2012 renewal campaign
- Sun-Sentinel: Coral Springs family sues Broward school district after bullying episode

Inside Higher Education: Committee on Measures of Student Success issues final report

Ocala Star Banner: Fired school employee files racial discrimination suit

St. Pete Times

Students from Hillsborough's alternative schools describe challenges, successes

By Marlene Sokol, Times Staff Writer

Thursday, December 1, 2011

TAMPA — No one blamed the system for their paths to alternative school.

By a show of hands, all 12 teens took responsibility for having been moved out of regular public schools.

But, when pressed, they pointed to things that might have contributed to their difficulties: classes that were large and impersonal, teachers who handed out failing grades without offering help, and fights that could have been prevented if someone had paid attention to the classroom chatter.

"As a teacher, you almost have to have rabbit ears," said Allen Bellande, 15.

Wednesday's gathering at Tampa Bay Technical High School was the district's seventh alternative education forum, a chance for kids on the margin to share their perspectives with members of the Hillsborough County School Board.

"I think this is one of the best groups we've had," said board member Doretha Edgecomb. "They were very thoughtful."

Several hundred Hillsborough students are educated in alternative settings, typically but not always because of discipline issues.

While not going into detail, some kids in Wednesday's group described suspensions that they felt were undeserved, and social pressure to appear tough.

They also gave details of positive experiences at Brandon Alternative, North Tampa Alternative and the Dorothy Thomas Exceptional Center.

"Now I'm actually learning more," said Maria Bautista of Brandon Alternative. Unlike other teachers whose lessons were hard to follow, she said, "the teacher walks around" and encourages participation.

Cody Thurston, also at Brandon Alternative, said the feedback he gets on his assignments is a lot more specific, with one teacher writing, "If you keep this up, we might have to talk about a future in law."

Still, many in the group were intent on transitioning back to mainstream schools, and one lobbied deputy superintendent Ken Otero to arrange a transfer before the end of the school year.

There were points of disagreement, mainly on the topic of incentives. About half the group approved of handing out points and prizes to students who pay attention and complete their work. The others cautioned that with too many prizes, students would fail to recognize the intrinsic rewards of learning.

The students who met Wednesday were not chosen at random, but selected because they have improved and are on track to return to mainstream schools.

They were an ambitious group, describing aspirations in law, medicine and the performing arts.

There was just one problem, Otero said.

"I've sat and I've heard everybody say what they want to be," he said. "You want to be a policeman. You want to be a doctor. You want to be an engineer. You want to be a graphics arts person.

"I didn't hear one person say they wanted to be a teacher."

WCTV-TV

8:43 AM Dec 1, 2011

Health Matters in Leon County Schools

The Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) is making great strides in Leon County.

Reporter: Danielle Eldredge

Tallahassee, Florida - November 22, 2011

Leon County School officials are working hard to eliminate childhood obesity. Here's more on the education committee that specializes in the overall health of students.

Members of the School Health Advisory Committee, or SHAC, are taking a more active approach in Leon County and the Florida Board of Education is taking notice.

"So they really looked completely at the data and said okay, if we're going to be successful as a committee we need to focus," said Penny Detscher from the Florida Department of Education.

Childhood obesity is the first health issue Leon County's SHAC is tackling, with students learning about health in P.E. class.

"How many hours of sleep did you get last night? Nine? Did you get 9?" said Leon County P.E. Coordinator Laurie Cox.

It's also included in other facets of the daily curriculum with teaching tools like "Adventure to Fitness."

"It incorporates geography, and math and sciences and different areas but kids are moving, they're jogging, they're moving, they're squatting, so they've got physical activity while they're learning some really important key areas," said Cox.

And they're not stopping there. SHAC objectives are infiltrating the lunch line.

"Increasing the fresh foods and vegetables that children are eating, and children are really figuring out that food doesn't come from a can ... it comes from a garden," said Detscher.

Administrators say since these adjustments are just taking off, it's difficult to measure the effectiveness. However, they're sure Leon County students will benefit from the new focus on health.

Right now, SHAC's primary focus is eliminating obesity, but it has big plans for the future.

STD awareness is the next subject the council wants to address.

Ft. Myers News Press

Outsider is wanted in interim at Edison State

Dave Breitenstein

11:14 PM, Nov. 30, 2011

Florida's higher education chancellor has pledged to assist Edison State College as it undergoes its first leadership change in 20 years.

Randall Hanna, chancellor of the Florida College System, confirmed Wednesday that he will address the board of trustees at its next meeting. The date hasn't been confirmed, but it likely will be held in early- to mid-December.

The board voted Tuesday to suspend District President Kenneth Walker and hire an attorney to build a termination case against Walker, whose contract runs through June 2014. The balance is valued at \$1.7 million, but Edison could avoid paying a severance by proving Walker failed to uphold the responsibilities of his office.

Trustees also want Hanna to assist the college in selecting an interim district president. Hanna could recommend a consultant, department staffer or retiree for the position. The board won't have to pay for Hanna's assistance. It's too early for the board to say how much it might cost to hire an attorney to build the termination case.

"We're still going to make the pick, but we feel like the chancellor's office is a fantastic and cost-effective resource to find an interim," said trustee Chris Vernon.

Hanna, on the job just two weeks, believes the transition period will be an important time for Edison.

"It is critical that the board has a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the future," Hanna said.

Charlotte Campus President Patricia Land has agreed to serve as acting district president until an interim is named. Land, 58, has worked at Edison State since November 2002, first as Charlotte provost and then campus president.

Land's tenure is expected to last six to eight months.

Trustees want an outsider to serve as interim district president, and chairwoman Ann Berlam prefers someone from the outside. That's probably the best course of action for a college in turmoil, according to Kevin Matthews, vice president for Massachusetts-based Registry for College and University Presidents.

"The person is not constrained by needs to further his or her career, but only has a dedication to needs of the institution," said Matthews, whose search firm has placed 80

interims this year. "They are unfettered with political obligations. They can make very hard decisions that need to be made at a school under distress."

The interim district president will serve while trustees conduct a search for Walker's successor. Other Florida community/state colleges with presidential vacancies are Florida Keys and Brevard, and New College of Florida in Sarasota opens its applicant pool today. As of Wednesday, 46 institutions nationwide were advertising president or chancellor vacancies on job boards run by The Chronicle of Higher Education and InsideHigherEd.

Relations between Walker and faculty turned icy this year as he, under direction of trustees, proposed a 2 percent pay increase for professors. He also recommended firings of two well-liked administrators and did not immediately disclose concerns about staff issuing hundreds of improper course substitutions to students and did not notify trustees that Edison's baccalaureate nursing program wasn't nationally accredited. The college also faced complaints of discriminatory hiring practices, although an outside attorney declared the college was OK.

Every day Walker is on paid suspension, he earns \$1,192 in base pay. That doesn't include his benefits, such as housing and development allowances that are paid annually. He also will continue receiving health and life insurance.

Berlam said the board's intention is to expedite its investigation into Walker's alleged faults.

"We're taking steps and moving forward," she said. "Everyone is committed to having Edison back on the solid footing it's always had."

Walker left Fort Myers on Wednesday to attend his brother's funeral in Texas.

Naples Daily News

Edison trustees hope students, faculty rally behind acting president after Walker's departure

By BRITTANY SHAMMAS

Wednesday, November 30, 2011

With President Kenneth Walker on paid leave pending an investigation into whether he can be terminated with cause, Edison State College trustees are hopeful faculty and students will rally behind the person leading the college in his place during the search for the Edison's next president.

Charlotte Campus President Patricia Land, who has previously served as district president in Walker's absence, stepped into Walker's role Wednesday, though she was not on campus due to a personal matter. Land will oversee the day-to-day operations of the college as a whole while still serving as leader of the Charlotte campus.

"It's really important now that we all pull in the same direction as hard as we can for the next six months," Trustee Chris Vernon said Tuesday after trustees voted 7-1 to place the embattled Walker on leave with pay.

In the meantime, trustees are preparing to start the search for an interim president and, ultimately, the college's next president, who they want in place in advance of fall semester 2012.

There's a feeling among a majority of the trustees that their decision, cheered by faculty and students who had long called for Walker's removal, will send a positive signal to Edison's accrediting body — which gave the school 14 areas of needed improvements earlier this month.

A spokeswoman for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, or SACS, which accredits Edison, said Wednesday it's too early to say if that feeling is warranted.

"Those kind of personnel actions kind of spin in their own orbit and reaccreditation in its own orbit," SACS spokeswoman Pamela Cravey said. "In and of itself, firing a president is not an accreditation issue."

The reaccreditation process continues through June, Cravey said, making it difficult to predict whether Walker's suspension will affect Edison's status. She could not recall offhand a similar case in which a school had ousted its president during the process.

"It may send a strong message — we certainly heard about it," Cravey said. "Other than that, everything's too early to say."

Edison has been under scrutiny following months of controversy, including a course-swapping scandal, underqualified professors in classrooms and miscommunication about the school's unaccredited nursing program. At the center of the controversy was Walker, who many students and faculty held as responsible.

The longtime president proposed Tuesday to leave his position in June 2012 — one year in advance of the date outlined in his contract — and to take a voluntary pay cut of \$70,000. That offer was rejected by trustees, who instead voted to accept a five-point plan that includes having Land serve as acting president until an interim president is found.

Land, who has led Charlotte campus since 2002 and has 30 years of experience in higher education, was the board's first pick for the position.

"She has a good understanding of the inner workings of the college and I think that she has good leadership skills," Vernon said.

Faculty Union President Ellie Bunting called Land the "logical choice" and said faculty are happy with her placement as acting president.

"We all think that's great," she said. "At least somebody is in charge."

Land was unavailable for comment Wednesday but plans to address the media Friday. She is taking on the duties of district president without additional compensation, Trustee Pamela Seay said.

It's unknown whether Land will relocate to the Lee County campus, Edison spokesman Eric McKinney said. Her time as acting president is expected to span six to eight weeks as trustees search for an interim president who can lead the school through the accreditation process.

They'd also look to the interim president to help clean up some of the issues faced by the school.

They are turning to Randy Hanna, chancellor of the Division of Florida Colleges, for assistance in finding that person. Without mentioning names, Hanna said Wednesday he knows of a number of people who be good candidates. He plans to attend a future board meeting and lay out options the board can pursue to locate an interim president, including using a consultant.

Vernon said his preference would be to look outside of the college for candidates. An ideal candidate, Seay said, would be a former president who has experience with the accreditation process.

"If it were up to me alone, the kind of person I'd be looking for is a retired president of a community college or a state college who has gone through accreditation issues before successfully, who is not interested in being president but who has the skills necessary to guide us through this process right now," she said.

Hanna is confident the board will find a suitable candidate within the 60 day time period they've outlined, even with the challenges at Edison.

"There are people who have a calling for education," he said, "and there are clearly people who have stepped into situations like you have at Edison and been successful."

Ft. Myers News Press

Editorial

Walker's suspension sad event

9:35 PM, Nov. 30, 2011

What a shame.

There had to be a better outcome for Edison State College President Ken Walker and for the institution than being escorted off into the sunset. After 20 prosperous years together, the man and the school deserved better from each other.

How did we get here? All key parties are to blame, as they focused on their own interests ahead of the students and the institution:

- A historically lax Board of Trustees apparently didn't fulfill their role and was too slow to change their ways. Gov. Scott recently named new trustees, removing key Walker allies.
- A union faculty apparently was intent on protecting its own interests, raises and perks. Just look at the Facebook site "Dr. Kenneth Walker Has Been Terminated" and to see their driving motivations, and
- Walker himself, who was too naive, too arrogant or both, and did not step forward with full accountability during a tumultuous year.

Walker spent nearly 20 years as the college's visionary leader and overseer of its expansion from two-year community college to four-year state college.

There was relative peace; in fact, Walker helped push faculty salaries from the bottom to the top of the state averages.

In hindsight, the problem started with the hiring and short, but disruptive, tenure of former Lee County Superintendent James Browder as a senior administrator. Walker had the authority to hire and fire and promote. But this particular decision is what sparked the subsequent animus and revelations, including Walker's compensation package; a vote of no confidence by faculty; discoveries about improper course substitutions; lack of accreditation for the four-year nursing program; the first stalemate in union negotiations in years; and a revolving door of senior administrators both voluntary and not.

All this was in the midst of a re-accreditation process that was essential to ensuring that students' degrees had value.

Despite early concerns, it appears, thankfully, that Edison is headed toward re-accreditation next year — its 50th anniversary

That was a milestone Walker had his heart set upon. He may have been so intent on that future, he did not see what was in front of him.

Trustees on Tuesday, including Walker allies, voted 7-1 to place him on leave, after rejecting his proposals for early retirement June 2012, and a pay cut. He was unceremoniously escorted off the premises and locked out of his office.

The circumstances of this effective ouster are truly sad, not just for him, but for the community as a whole.

It is likely we'll see costly legal battles: Trustees are launching an investigation to see if there's cause to fire Walker and avoid a \$1.7 million payout for the rest of his contract.

This new Board exhibited a sense of urgency Tuesday. To rebuild momentum, this Board must establish also thoughtful leadership based on in-depth discussion, analysis and consideration, with the best interests of the students and school in mind.

Edison State College has been Southwest Florida's gem for nearly 50 years. This board has a responsibility to remove the tarnish and restore its brilliance.

St. Pete Times

Editorial

Put lawmakers' record on education to test

Thursday, December 1, 2011

When the people of Florida adopted a constitutional amendment in 1998 directing lawmakers to make "high quality" free public education a "paramount duty" of the state, the expectation was that legislators would raise educational excellence and funding to a top priority. But Florida ranks 41st among the 50 states in total per-pupil funding, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and the state's high school graduation rates and SAT scores rank near the bottom of the nation. Now the Florida Supreme Court is being asked whether a lawsuit that challenges this legislative negligence should be allowed to proceed — something the state is vigorously fighting. This shouldn't be a close call. Florida's leaders should have to defend their record on education in court.

The initial lawsuit brought by Florida public school students, parents and two education-related nonprofits says that Florida leaders have not followed the dictates of the state Constitution, which require Florida to make "adequate provision" for a "high quality system of free public schools." Their suit alleges that graduation rates are too low, student achievement too iffy and the money the state provides for education, particularly in teachers' salaries, is inadequate.

These kind of lawsuits, which ask courts to evaluate whether lawmakers are upholding the state Constitution's educational adequacy guarantees, have been around for decades. Across the country, state courts have been generally willing to adopt judicial standards of educational quality, holding their Legislatures accountable for meeting adequate funding and other educational objectives. Only a minority have taken a hands-off approach, claiming that to second-guess the Legislature would violate the separation of powers.

This latter argument is the basis of a challenge by Senate President Mike Haridopolos, House Speaker Dean Cannon and others, who asked the 1st District Court of Appeal for a "writ of prohibition" to halt the education lawsuit filed against them on the grounds that educational quality is a political issue for the Legislature alone. In an 8-7 ruling on Nov. 23, the appellate court denied their request and certified the question to the Florida Supreme Court as a matter of great public importance. The high court has the discretion to accept the case or not.

This is a valuable opportunity for the high court to protect the will of the people. The situation today is very different from what it was in 1996, when the high court ruled in *Coalition for Adequacy and Fairness in School Funding Inc. vs. Chiles* that lawmakers should be given "enormous discretion" to interpret the state Constitution's requirement for an adequate and uniform public school system. After that case, the 1997-1998 Constitution Revision Commission proposed a constitutional amendment to provide measurable education standards. Floridians approved an amendment that made education a "fundamental value" and a "paramount duty" and required the system to be not just uniform but "efficient, safe, secure, and high quality."

The courts are empowered to uphold Florida's Constitution when it's sidestepped by the other branches. A case challenging whether lawmakers are fulfilling the Constitution's education mandate should be allowed to proceed, with each side's claims judged on the merits. That's how accountability is supposed to work in a democracy.

The Jacksonville Examiner

Supreme Court to weigh-in on lawsuit by Duval students/parents against state

Steve DiMattia, Jacksonville Public Education Examiner

November 30, 2011

A lawsuit that was in part brought by students and parents from Duval County Public Schools alleging that state lawmakers violated Florida's Constitution by not adequately funding public schools will move forward to the Florida Supreme Court.

The First District Court of Appeal in Tallahassee refused to end the lawsuit, originally initiated in 2009 by two non-profits, Citizens for Strong Schools and Fund Education Now, along with two students and four parents or guardians of children in Duval and Pasco County schools, in a sharply divided 8-7 ruling on November 23.

The lawsuit cites a 1998 constitutional provision that states, in relevant part:

The education of children is a fundamental value of the people of the State of Florida. It is, therefore, a paramount duty of the state to make adequate provision for the education of all children residing within its borders. Adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education

The groups were motivated by Florida's ranking of 50th out of 50 states in per capita funding for K-12 public education and 39th in per pupil funding. They also point out that, in the last decade, the state's share of funding for the Florida Education Funding Program has dropped from nearly 60 percent to about 37 percent as lawmakers have shifted the responsibility for funding schools onto local communities through property taxes.

The lawsuit was originally filed in the Leon County Circuit Court in Tallahassee by former Speaker of the Florida House and current University of Florida law professor Jon Mills, Neil Chonin and Jodi Siegel of the non-profit Southern Legal Counsel and the recently deceased Thom Rumberger of the law firm Rumberger, Kirk & Caldwell.

"We don't blame any single party, person or group," said Mills at the time of filing. "The problem is the result of years of not fulfilling our paramount duty. It's everyone's fault, and it's everyone's duty to help fix it."

Dissent in the recent ruling came from those judges questioning whether courts have the legal power to determine school funding. The case will now move to the Supreme Court, where the appeals court has requested clarification on whether the constitutional language "set(s) forth judicially ascertainable standards that can be used to determine the adequacy, efficiency, safety, security and high quality of public education on a statewide basis." They stated that the answer to that question was a matter of "great public importance."

The Florida Department of Education and legislative leaders (defendants in the case) – Senate President Mike Haridopolos, House Speaker Dean Cannon and former Education Commissioner Eric Smith – sought dismissal of the suit on separation-of-powers grounds, staking the position that the Legislature and governor are solely responsible for determining what is meant by "adequate funding." They argued that no court has the authority to order the Legislature to spend more on schools.

Judge Clayton Roberts, writing for the minority, agreed, stating that the state's petition for dismissal should have been granted:

"As in matters of appropriations, under our Constitution's strict separation of powers, only the Legislature is properly equipped to balance the competing interests involved in education debates... Thus, it is solely in the legislative branch that the constitutional values of an 'efficient, safe, security and high quality' school system can be constitutionally defined and implemented."

But Chief Judge Robert Benton, speaking for the majority, said that the people have a right to go to court when the Legislature and governor fail to comply with requirements in the Constitution.

Continue reading on Examiner.com Supreme Court to weigh-in on lawsuit by Duval students/parents against state - Jacksonville Public Education | Examiner.com <http://www.examiner.com/public-education-in-jacksonville/supreme-court-to-weigh-on-lawsuit-by-duval-students-parents-against-state#ixzz1fHhJ19fg>

Sarasota Herald Tribune

SCF president's contract is questioned

By Christopher O'Donnell

Wednesday, November 30, 2011 at 7:52 p.m.

A legendary tennis coach and a two-time Grand Slam doubles champion were at State College of Florida on Wednesday as the school named new tennis courts after them.

But the meeting also became a show of support for College President Lars Hafner, one day after trustees publicly questioned why he has a five-year contract that guarantees him a payout of about \$1.6 million if he is terminated.

Nick Bollettieri, who founded the Bradenton tennis academy now known as IMG, and former tennis champion Betsy Nagelsen McCormack both attended the meeting to endorse Hafner to college trustees.

"In the short time I've known Dr. Hafner, I had come to have such respect for him and admire him and respect his integrity and his vision," Nagelsen McCormack said.

The extra scrutiny of college operations appears to be a new way of life at SCF, whose board was recently stacked by Gov. Rick Scott and charged with eliminating government waste.

At a meeting Tuesday, trustees talked for almost 45 minutes Tuesday about Hafner's contract even with Hafner seated at the same table.

Hafner's salary and benefits are based on the average awarded to presidents of state colleges that offer bachelor's degree programs.

The questions by some trustees sparked a clash between Scott's appointees and longtime board members whose earlier decisions are now being questioned.

"What kind of message are we sending to Dr. Hafner?" asked Trustee Joe Miller, a member of the previous board that approved Hafner's contract. "I'm concerned about the staff and what they are seeing and hearing with the actions of this board."

Trustees were quick to point out that their questions are merely fact-finding exercises and should not be taken to mean they are unhappy with Hafner's leadership.

But it is clear the new trustees plan to bring a greater level of scrutiny to college operations than previous boards.

Earlier this year, trustees established three sub-committees to scrutinize the operations of the former community college.

They have also questioned college administrators on expenditures such as how the college will recoup the start-up costs of new bachelor's degree programs.

SCF is not the only state college facing extra scrutiny from new trustees appointed by Scott.

The Board of Trustees at Edison State College in Fort Myers — which included four Scott appointees — suspended longtime President Kenneth Walker Tuesday night pending an investigation to determine if the board has grounds to fire him. That college was cited by an accreditation agency in 14 areas including integrity. Its new nursing program has also run into accreditation problems.

Walker, who has been president for 20 years, was not allowed to return to his office after the meeting to gather his personal effects, a college official said. Walker's contract would entitle him to a \$1.7 million severance package if the board terminates him.

Nagelson McCormick said she and Bolletteri attended the meeting to show their support for Hafner, who she said has been affected by the changes at the college.

"I was aware that there might be tension that Dr. Hafner has been feeling with the current board," she said. "He's such an upbeat man and he wasn't his usual self."

Associated Press

Police investigate another FAMU student's death for possible hazing connection

December 1, 2011 - 5:51am

December 1, 2011 - 05:36am

Police investigate another FAMU student's death for possible hazing connection

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Authorities are investigating another possible case of hazing connected to Florida A&M University band.

The Tallahassee Police Department has opened an investigation into the alleged battery of 18-year-old Bria Shante Hunter.

Hunter's parents told Atlanta's WXIA-TV on Tuesday that the freshman clarinet player suffered a fractured thigh bone and damaged knee. They say when she returned to Georgia she couldn't bend her legs.

Officer David Northway confirmed they are investigating whether the injuries came from hazing.

A police report states the alleged battery started Sept. 15 and continued through Nov. 7, shortly before drum major [Robert Champion collapsed outside an Orlando hotel and died](#). Investigators have linked his death to hazing.

Hunter's father told The Associated Press on Wednesday that he was at Champion's funeral and could not immediately comment.

The university [fired band director Julian White](#) after Champion's death. White [plans to fight the termination](#).

The band program has [a sordid history with hazing](#). A former member from Jacksonville [won a \\$1.8 million award](#) in 2004 in a civil battery lawsuit. His lawyer told the Times-Union at the time the 2001 incident caused a kidney to temporarily shut down and may have left the man in need of a kidney transplant.

Read more at Jacksonville.com: <http://jacksonville.com/news/crime/2011-12-01/story/police-investigate-another-famu-students-death-possible-hazing#ixzz1fH1KMN4>

New York Times

November 30, 2011

Districts Pay Less in Poor Schools, Report Says

By SAM DILLON

Education experts have long argued that a basic inequity in American schooling is that students in poor neighborhoods are frequently taught by low-paid rookie teachers who move on as they gain experience and rise up the salary scale.

Until now, however, researchers lacked nationwide data to prove it. That changed Wednesday when the Department of Education released a 78-page report.

Its conclusion: Tens of thousands of schools serving low-income students are being shortchanged because districts spend fewer state and local dollars on teacher salaries in those schools than on salaries in schools serving higher-income students.

"Low-income students need extra support and resources to succeed, but in far too many places, policies for assigning teachers and allocating resources are perpetuating the problem rather than solving it," Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in a conference call.

The report, Comparability of State and Local Expenditures Among Schools Within Districts, is based on data collected from 84,000 public schools in districts that had to report salary expenditures to receive emergency federal money under the 2009 economic stimulus law, which channeled \$100 billion to public education.

The inequities documented in the report began to accumulate within a few years of the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the main federal law on public schools, which channels money to educate poor children. To prevent them from simply substituting the federal antipoverty dollars for local funds, districts had to show that they were spending at least as much state and local education money in the poor schools getting federal money as they were spending in their more affluent

schools. But a loophole allowed school systems to report educator salaries to Washington using a districtwide pay schedule, thus masking large salary gaps between the higher-paid veteran staffs in middle-class schools and the young teachers earning entry-level pay in poor parts of the district.

A few researchers have documented the problem with statewide data in Florida and some other states, said Cynthia Brown, a vice president at the Center for American Progress, a liberal research group. "But I'm excited because this is the first time that data documenting the problem has ever been collected on a nationwide basis," she said. "Many of us have known for a long time that in some individual districts the high-poverty schools weren't getting their fair share of state and local funds."

Federal officials estimated that although the inequities were widespread, alleviating them would not be costly.

"Providing low-income schools with comparable spending would cost as little as 1 percent of the average district's total spending," but the extra resources "would make a big impact by adding between 4 percent and 15 percent to the budget" of schools serving poor students, the department said in a statement.

Miami Herald

Posted on Wed, Nov. 30, 2011

Miami-Dade teachers union may have to revote on contract

By Laura Figueroa

Miami-Dade public school teachers may have to revote on their contract with the school district.

On Wednesday, a hearing officer with the Florida Public Employee Relations Commission issued a recommendation that the United Teachers of Dade allow its members to revote on the contract, on the grounds that votes collected in May were invalid because the union relied on an online system.

"There was no daily total of the vote and no way for a voter to observe the tally," hearing officer Jerry W. Chatham wrote.

The recommendation was in response to a complaint filed by teacher Shawn Beightol, who argued that the virtual vote was unreliable and not secure. Beightol, a former candidate for UTD president and vocal critic of the union, also complained that teachers did not have enough time to make an informed decision on the contract, which included agreeing to a merit-based pay system and changing the teacher evaluation criteria.

Under the complaint process, the recommendation does not become final until approved by the commission's three-member board, a decision that could be delayed should UTD appeal Wednesday's recommendation, said Steve Meck, general counsel for PERC.

UTD President Karen Aronowitz said the union is "seeking clarification of the ruling" and has not decided if it would appeal or reschedule the votes. In May, close to 4,000 union members approved changes to their teacher evaluation system, and in August close to 6,000 teachers voted to ratify the union's contract with the district.

"We feel confident that the bargaining unit will vote the same way again today," Aronowitz said.

While the hearing officer sided with Beightol's complaint that the online vote was invalid, Chatham said the union took ample steps to notify members of the vote via e-mail and Facebook.

"I'm happy that PERC recognized that online voting is not secure...the votes need to be counted publicly," Beightol said.

The new pay system is part of state and national education reforms and will be required under state law by 2014. Miami-Dade schools is paying for the new system with a Race to the Top grant from the Obama Administration.

Education Week

Published Online: November 30, 2011

Experts Say Social Sciences Are 'Left Behind'

By Sarah D. Sparks

Washington —As the majority of states implement common-core content standards, some experts are arguing that the focus on mathematics and language arts leaves out the social and economic studies that can help students connect content to their daily lives.

Researchers at an NRC forum on social sciences in Washington this month suggested that the expansion of testing in math and reading under the No Child Left Behind Act has led to a piecemeal approach to social and behavioral science subjects in the states. While all but four states have adopted the common-core standards in mathematics and language arts and the NRC has proposed a full set of voluntary national science standards, social and behavioral sciences have failed to gain a significant presence in either set of standards, despite protests last year from the field.

"No Child Left Behind frankly left us behind, and the common core gave us a footnote," said S.G. Grant, the education dean at Binghamton University in Binghamton, N.Y.

The discussion caps a year of dismal news on the social studies front for U.S. students: National Assessment of Educational Progress reports out this year found mostly mediocre performance for students in geography, civics, and history.

9-12 Social Studies Standards

For Delaware and Minnesota

States can differ dramatically in the amount of attention they require schools to devote to specific topics in the social and behavioral sciences.

SOURCE: Survey of Enacted Curriculum, University of WisconsinThe NRC plans to draft recommendations for states to use social and behavioral studies to tie together content in the common core. The NRC discussion mirrors a separate conversation launched last May by state school chiefs over the development of social studies standards, but experts at the NRC forum argued that social sciences should not be taught only within a stand-alone subject course.

"It is the integration of sciences, not the separation, that moves science forward," said Martha Zaslow, the policy and communications director for the Society for Research in Child Development, in Washington, arguing that schools should begin teaching students from the elementary grades on up to use an "integrated approach" to content.

Incorporating perspectives from social sciences can help students connect otherwise-separated core subjects, like reading and science, to the interdisciplinary uses of those lessons in real life, according to Mr. Grant.

"I can't think of a social problem that has a disciplinary focus," Mr. Grant said. "What social problem has only a political solution, or for which only history can give a lens on? The value of the social sciences is in the ways we can think about social problems through multiple lenses."

Social Studies Standards

In a study released at the forum and commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences, of which the NRC is a part, researchers at the University of Michigan, working with the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, analyze the social and behavioral studies—including anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology—in states' K-12 content standards from 2007 to 2010. The study looks at content standards from eight states: Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, and Wisconsin.

Co-authors Diane Massell, a senior research associate at the consortium, and Carol A. Barnes, an assistant research scientist, found that states gave the most attention to political science, economics, and geography. But "there was a lot of variation in what was given attention and where," Ms. Massell said. "The standards don't have legs on their own—they're not going to walk into a classroom and be used."

For example, history topics made up nearly a third of all state social studies standards, and anthropology popped up sporadically across states, but sociology and psychology content was "almost negligible" in all but Idaho's standards.

Accountability is even more sporadic for social studies topics, researchers found. For example, 21 states now require an economics course for high school graduation, up from only 13 in 1998, but only 19 states require students to be tested in the subject, down from 25 in 1998, according to William D. Bosshardt, a senior adviser for program development at the Council for Economic Education, based in New York City.

Opportunity Gap?

Experts voiced concern that the lack of time spent on social and behavioral topics in the main curriculum may be creating opportunity gaps for students planning to take honors courses in high school. The University of Michigan study analyzed the nearly 600,000 Advanced Placement exams taken in Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, and Virginia in 2010 and found 25 percent to 40 percent of all exams were in the social- and behavioral-science fields, from psychology to micro- and macroeconomics—suggesting students interested in advanced coursework need more preparation early on in social-science content.

Moreover, even if students have access to social and behavioral courses, they may not be schooled in the skills they need to succeed in those courses. In the University of Michigan's analysis of K-3 and 9-12 standards in Delaware and Minnesota, the researchers found more than 60 percent of elementary content standards in social and behavioral topics and more than a third of those at the high school level required only basic skills of memorization or information processing. By contrast, less than 3 percent of high school standards in those fields and less than 1 percent of elementary content standards required students to synthesize, evaluate, and make connections between concepts—the most advanced cognitive skills.

Shirley M. Malcom, the director of education and human-resources programs at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in Washington, said prior attempts to boost social-science topics in the curriculum have failed because teachers and administrators already have too much to cover in a given year. "If you took every standard and stacked them up, they'd end up being thigh-high," she said.

Ms. Massell of the research consortium agreed. "States are already struggling to cogently and coherently add content" to comply with common-core standards, she said. "We need to consider integration in nontraditional subjects."

Felice J. Levine, the executive director of the American Educational Research Association, in Washington, also agreed. She noted that schools could use basic psychology instruction, for example, to help students reflect on day-to-day issues such as bullying or social networking. "It is how we develop a deeper and richer curriculum," she said.

Education Week

Learning Language Blog

New Study on Hispanic Achievement Paints Stark Picture

By Leslie Maxwell on November 29, 2011 2:02 PM

I did a quick Google news search to see who else might be writing and discussing the Council of the Great City Schools' report on Latino students. I came across one interesting take on a blog called Latina Lista.

Blogger Marisa Treviño found a statement about immigration in the study that I missed and it's a really important one to bring to everyone's attention. The study says that Hispanic students "face constant suspicions about whether they are in the country legally."

I'd love to get all of you who teach Latino students, especially those who are English-language learners, talking about this issue and how you think it is impacting their achievement. Please discuss.

A brand-new study examining the nation's fastest-growing population of students—Hispanics—is out today, and the findings are pretty bleak.

The Council of the Great City Schools has just published "Today's Promise, Tomorrow's Future: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Hispanics in Urban Schools," which takes a close look at how Hispanic students in urban school systems are faring compared with their white peers nationally.

The report also delves into the achievement of Hispanic students who are formerly English-language learners and compares how they are doing with their Hispanic peers who are ELLs and their Hispanic peers who are not.

Among the key findings, according to researchers with the council:

- When it comes to "readiness to learn," Hispanic children face several disadvantages compared with their white peers. Thirty-three percent of Hispanic children in 2008 lived in families where no parent had full-time employment compared with 21 percent of white children. And in 2007, 27 percent of Hispanic children lived in poverty compared with 10 percent of white children. Those factors and others translate to Hispanic children being less likely than their white or black peers to recognize letters of the alphabet, knowing how to write their name, or being able to count to 20 or higher.

- On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Hispanic and ELL proficiency rates in reading from 2003 to 2009 were at least 26 percentage points below the rates for white students in 4th grade and 24 percentage points below white students' in 8th grade. For math in those same years, the proportion of Hispanic students performing at or above "proficient" was at least 29 percentage points lower than for white students in 4th grade and 26 points lower in 8th grade.

- The average scores for Hispanic students who were former ELLs were significantly higher than their Hispanic peers who were ELLs in both subjects.

•Overall, reading and math achievement for Hispanics and Hispanic ELLs on NAEP in certain large city school systems was generally lower than their respective peers in public schools nationally. But some urban systems were an exception—Austin, Texas; Miami-Dade; and Houston among them—and generally produced higher scores in 2009 among Hispanic and Hispanic ELLs than their peers in other large cities.

•Hispanic students in 2008 were much more at risk of dropping out than their white and black peers: 2 1/2 times more likely to drop out than white students and almost twice as likely as black students. And in 2010, fewer than two out of 10 Hispanic students took an Advanced Placement exam compared with six out of 10 white students.

The council makes no recommendations for how to tackle these difficult issues for Hispanic students, but does intend to bring together a panel of leaders to brainstorm and provide advice on how to improve the school experience and outcome for them.

Wall Street Journal

DECEMBER 1, 2011.

Teacher Faction Expands to L.A.

By STEPHANIE BANCHERO

An organization of young teachers who support overhauling union contracts launched a new chapter in Los Angeles Wednesday, part of a growing faction of groups that have successfully challenged old-guard labor leaders to overhaul the nation's schools.

The New York City-based Educators 4 Excellence said nearly 200 Los Angeles teachers had joined the group and signed a declaration calling for linking teacher evaluations to student test scores and ending policies that allow the least veteran teachers to be laid off first.

The announcement by the nonprofit group comes as the Los Angeles school district and union leaders are locked in tough contract negotiations.

"When teachers are fully informed and empowered, they hold themselves and their students to high expectations," said Ama Nyamekye, executive director of the Los Angeles chapter and a former New York City teacher.

Educators 4 Excellence, or E4E, is one of a handful of groups working both within and outside existing unions to encourage teachers to become active in reshaping local policies on teacher evaluation, tenure and layoffs. Despite their small numbers, the groups have changed the policy debates in many cities.

Teach Plus, for example, which connects groups of teachers to top policy makers in six cities, including Boston, Chicago and Memphis, helped alter the Indianapolis contract to ensure that teacher effectiveness was considered when laying off teachers with less than six years of experience. E4E, which claims about 3,000 members in New York City, helped shape a similar bill in New York that passed the Senate but not the Assembly.

Other groups include NewTLA, a caucus within Unified Teachers Los Angeles, the city teachers union, and the New Millennium Initiative, a network of educators in five cities that tries to influence local and state education policies.

Teach Plus and E4E have come under fire from critics who charge they are funded by outside organizations and don't represent the view of most local teachers. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, awarded E4E about \$1 million and Teach Plus about \$4 million.

Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, said the funding from national organizations raised questions. "It hurts the morale of the teachers when you have outside groups trying to force an agenda," he said.

Leaders of both groups said they launched their organizations with local teachers before getting Gates Foundation money to expand into other districts.

The groups have mainly attracted those new to the profession, though older teachers have also joined. Many younger educators, who attended school when student testing took hold, feel more comfortable than veteran teachers using data to alter their teaching methods and to judge their performance. They also worry about layoff policies.

April Bain, a 29-year-old math teacher at Downtown Magnets High School in Los Angeles, said she joined E4E in part because she didn't approve of how layoffs were made last year. "It doesn't seem right to just make an Excel spreadsheet of start dates and just start deleting the first 200 rows," she said. "I'm new to this, but I want to be part of the process to find a better way to make those decisions."

Lakeland Ledger

Scott Wants to Ensure Funds Available for Independent USF Poly

By Mary Toothman

Wednesday, November 30, 2011 at 5:07 p.m.

LAKELAND | Florida will collect more revenue for the first time in four years, but that increased income next year will be eaten up by growing Medicaid costs, Gov. Rick Scott told The Ledger Editorial Board on Wednesday.

When he releases his proposed budget to the Legislature next week, Scott said he will have recommendations for ways to deal with the rising Medicaid costs. Ultimately, he said, the federal government should allow states to handle the medical care for the indigent in their own ways.

Asked his priorities for the 2012 legislative session he said he had "three buckets" of issues.

"Don't allow government to do anything that will increase the cost of living; make sure people can get an education; and make sure that we are the place to get jobs and for companies to come here."

Scott met with editorial board members and newsroom reporters and editors Wednesday, the day after attending the Republican Governors Conference in Orlando and a private reception at Fantasy of Flight in Auburndale.

During his 2010 campaign for governor, The Ledger was the only newspaper at which Scott gave an editorial board interview.

"I knew I wouldn't get many endorsements, and I was going to focus on getting to the voters," he said.

Now, as he nears the end of his first year in office, the governor has hit the editorial board trail, visiting several newspapers and television stations.

He appeared more relaxed than he did as a brand-new governor and went through a wide variety of questions dealing with issues such as his pledge to add more jobs, priorities on business tax cuts, the possibility of a property tax reduction amendment in the state constitution and learning to deal with the news media.

Scott said his biggest push in 2012 will be education, both K-12 and higher education, where he said the emphasis must be on science, engineering, technology and math.

"I want higher education to focus on where the jobs are. Our job should be to prepare students for jobs," he said.

And jobs will come with businesses, Scott said, and that's why in his third "bucket" he wants regulations, particularly those involved in the building permit processes, reduced. He said he also plans to try and increase an exemption on the first \$25,000 in business revenue by bumping it to the first \$50,000.

Asked about the adjustments he had to make in going from corporate management to an elective office, Scott said, they are more alike than different.

"In business, you have to persuade and reach agreement ... just as in dealing with the (Florida) Cabinet and the Legislature.

"The big difference is more media attention," he said.

Another change is the governor is often not in control of his own schedule, Scott said. It is a whirlwind of meetings, and when he entered office he was facing 2,000 appointments that needed to be made, ranging from agency heads to regional boards.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Since taking office, Scott seemed to have relaxed his approach on immigration reform. In the 2010 campaign, he said the strict Arizona plan seemed noteworthy.

But on Wednesday, he talked about a need for some imported labor and about the use of electronic verification to check potential employees' backgrounds. Those issues, too, are tied with concerns for jobs and protection of local businesses.

"I think we have to be cautious," he said on requiring businesses to e-verify. "It is a federal issue. We have to secure the borders and look at a (visiting worker) visa program. ... It has to be fair and no profiling," he said.

Scott said he plans to work with citrus growers to make certain they have adequate access to labor.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Some of his comments Wednesday were at odds with previously reported statements.

Scott said Wednesday that he refused federal money for high-speed rail because he asked for a guarantee that any contractor for the project would absorb any cost overruns but no contractor would come forward with that guarantee.

Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland, a strong high-speed rail advocate, said Scott's assertion was not true.

"He would not allow RFPs (Requests for Proposals) to go to get that guarantee in writing nor would he meet with the eight consortiums (interested in building the rail) to allow them the opportunity to make that commitment," she said.

EDUCATION

On education, Scott said there is no preferential treatment for charter schools in his administration, though Polk County School District officials have said otherwise.

The county has 23 charter schools that serve about 11,000 students, and the School District has about 94,000 students.

School Board member Frank O'Reilly has been outspoken in saying there is an inequity in funding between charter schools and other public schools. He has said Scott is out of touch with the challenges most public schools face, including the number of poor students.

Scott said he has visited both charter schools and other public schools.

"My impression, at least, is a lot of charter schools are dealing with individuals who don't have that much money. It's just creating choice for people," Scott said.

"I think what we need to be doing is to allow whomever is doing the best job for students to succeed. I just want the best schools for these students.

FOREIGN TRADE

On a recent trade mission to Brazil, Scott said, he discovered that country's enormous impact on Florida's economy and the need for the federal government to help.

"It is the second biggest country affecting our tourism," he said. "They spend \$1 billion a year coming to South Florida and to Disney. If we could streamline the visa problem, that would increase."

Scott said the lack of U.S. consulates for issuing visas in many parts of Brazil is a detriment.

Brazil was his third trade mission extolling Florida businesses since taking office. Next week he will conduct a similar mission to Israel.

Education Week

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Middle Schoolers Getting Prepped for College

By Nora Fleming

Middle school students are being asked to do much more than take prealgebra these days; they're being asked to start launching their future careers.

A rise in college- and career-readiness programs targeted at middle schoolers, particularly disadvantaged ones, has been spurred by mounting research that shows middle school is a key time to improve the academics and attitudes needed to succeed in high school, college, and beyond.

But successful programs aimed at the middle grades cannot focus solely on mapping out coursework and taking standardized tests, educators say. They have to reach young adolescents in innovative ways that combine the efforts of parents, schools, and the community to set those students on a path to a better future. Students have to especially feel they are pursuing their own goals.

"Young adolescence is a time of exploration and wonder, so the middle grades are a critical time for students to begin considering their life beyond high school," said Patti Kinney, the associate director of middle-level services for the National Association of Secondary School Principals. "Effective middle-grades schools help students understand their potential and give them multiple opportunities to explore the future through a variety of experiences, support, and guidance."

What Do You Want to Be?

Beginning this school year, Mississippi 8th graders are not just deciding "what they want to be when they grow up" but figuring out the necessary steps to become what they want to be. Pathways to Success, a new initiative spearheaded by the state education department, has students select a career and then map out the path they would need to take in high school and college to enable them to work in that field, an effort to encourage students to set higher goals for the future.

Other college- and career-readiness programs targeting middle school students are also cropping up around the country.

Some, like Mississippi's, are just beginning. Others are expansions of established high school programs into the middle grades, and still others are ramped-up versions of existing middle school programs.

Research showing that the middle school years may determine students' future academic achievement has encouraged that growth, said Steve Kappler, the assistant vice president of educational services at ACT Inc., the Iowa City, Iowa-based college-entrance-exam company.

ACT researchers found in 2008 that the academic level students achieve by 8th grade has a bigger impact on college and career readiness and success than anything that happens academically in high school. And last year's "Building a Grad Nation," released by Civic Enterprises, a Washington-based public-policy advising firm, and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, found warning signs that a student may not finish high school appear as early as the elementary and middle grades. Interventions are called for, particularly in middle school, when indicators show students are on a fast track to dropping out in high school, the study found.

Mr. Kappler said the ACT has seen about a 40 percent growth in the past five years in the sales of EXPLORE, a test it produces that shows 8th and 9th graders' weaknesses in core subject areas. The test is supposed to help educators target students earlier who might need extra help to meet high school prerequisites for college.

But getting students academically up to par is not the only thing students need to succeed after middle school, the research says. To overcome some potential barriers to college readiness, the ACT this past year also launched ENGAGE, an assessment program for middle and high school students that helps spot weaknesses in the behavioral and attitudinal—as well as academic—traits linked to long-term education and career accomplishments.

Developmental changes and heightened social pressures make middle school a challenging time for many students, said Deborah Kasak, the executive director of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, a Savoy, Ill.-based alliance of educators that works to improve the quality of middle schools nationwide. But it's also an important time to reach them about taking the right steps for the future, she added, but not solely by demanding students take certain classes before they enter high school.

"We need to instill in our students the habits of mind, skills, and work that will prepare them well for the future while remembering they are still young adolescents," Ms. Kasak said. "We don't want to forget they are still learning about themselves, thinking about options, and really thinking for the first time about what they may want to do now and when they graduate."

Support Systems

Role models, like parents and teachers, are seen as crucial to fostering a better attitude about future pathways for middle school students. A number of middle-school-focused college- and career-readiness programs do significant outreach to parents and teachers for that reason.

In Columbus, Ohio, Blueprint College: 2.0, a college-readiness initiative supported by the school district there, Ohio State University, and the nonprofit I Know I Can, reaches out not only to the 11,000 middle schoolers in that district but their parents, too. Since 2009, a series of workshops on college and career awareness for middle school students and their parents have been provided in the city, the majority of whose students are from underserved populations. Families whose children may not be on a college track are actively recruited.

At the workshops, middle schoolers participate in engaging activities with college students and staff members aimed at understanding college's role in achieving career and life goals, while their parents learn about financial aid, prerequisite classes, and the college-application process.

"If you don't reach students during middle school, they don't realize the clock is ticking when they arrive at high school," said Amy Wade, the I Know I Can director of early awareness and grants. "While they will have options, they won't have as many options if they don't think about planning and preparing for college early and often."

For most parents, it's not a lack of interest in their children's future, but lack of know-how, she said. Many are unaware of the likelihood their child could attend college or about essential steps to preparation.

Free bus passes, dinner, and supervision for young children has enabled more parents to come to the workshops. This year so far, 1,300 families have attended, up from 270 in 2009.

Parent polling has found a significant improvement in their knowledge and attitudes about college for their children.

Creating a "college-going culture" in the home, Ms. Wade said, makes it much more likely children are pushed toward college and better future paths.

Teacher support, in addition to parents', is also needed to get middle school students on the right path, said Susana Navarro, the executive director of the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, an initiative in Texas that aims to bolster academic preparation provided in schools linked to postsecondary success in schools.

The collaborative, which serves 180,000 predominantly low-income and minority students in 12 districts in the El Paso area, has focused on better preparing teachers to heighten the academic rigor in classes and changing teachers' attitudes about students' potential by providing both high-quality curriculum materials and ongoing professional development.

Many teachers thought few of their students were college material, Ms. Navarro said, which can have particularly negative effects on middle school students.

"We start by asking [teachers] who they believe should be prepared for college—and who shouldn't—and ask whether it would be all right if someone assumed that their own child wasn't 'college material,'" she said. "[Creating a college-going culture] is more than just putting diplomas on the wall and hanging college flags. There has to be a real internalization on the part of the teacher for the potential of each youngster."

Key Linkages Now and Beyond

A number of other initiatives around the country also combine the forces of local universities, school districts, and intermediary organizations to support students in middle school through high school graduation with blended public-private funding, a variety of resources, and programming tailored to meet students' developmental needs.

That is the premise of the federal Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, or GEAR UP, which awards six-year grants to states and partnerships to support college- and career-readiness programs that start in high-poverty middle schools and follow students through high school.

The Chicago public schools has benefited from GEAR UP grants since the program started in 1999, a time when efforts to target middle schoolers were fairly nascent, said Teryl Ann Rosch, the administrator of the Chicago GEAR UP Alliance.

Universities in Chicago work with the city's high-need schools and intermediary organizations to provide programming that includes summer transition to high school, teacher professional development, tutoring and mentoring for struggling learners, college visits, and information sessions for parents. The goal is to prepare students for the academic rigor of high school and make college a desirable and realistic goal.

"At this early stage in the students' lives, the visits [to college] demystify what colleges are like, while providing the students with aspirations for their future," Ms. Rosch said.

Other programs that link middle schools to high schools have enabled high school students to walk off the stage at graduation with two sheepskins: a high school diploma and an associate degree.

The Early College High School Initiative, started in 2002 with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, among other sources, helps low-income, underrepresented, and first-generation high school students prepare for college, as well as earn up to two years of college credit or an associate degree, tuition free. There are about 230 of these schools to date across the country.

A number of them have started programs in their feeder middle schools, said Joel Vargas, the vice president of Jobs for the Future, an organization that works with the initiative and other projects that support youth and adult career-readiness efforts.

The program helps students who might not be inclined to pursue a higher education "see" themselves as college students starting in middle school, and by high school, creates a much more accessible and affordable path to get there, Mr. Vargas said.

In Texas, the Texas High School Project, an alliance of public and private organizations, supports 44 such schools, serving 84,000 students. And in New York state, 10 universities in the City University of New York system have partnered with early-college secondary schools to prepare middle school students for a high school where they can take the college-credit courses.

The New York schools focus intensely on building middle schoolers' core academic skills and exposing them to college experiences to get them interested in pursuing the rigorous academics needed to attend. Middle school students visit the universities and take mini and elective courses from college faculty members. Many are mentored by college tutors.

The first early-college secondary school in the CUNY initiative graduated its first batch of high schoolers last spring. Ninety-five percent graduated on time, 40 percent earned an associate degree as well as a high school diploma, and nearly 40 percent earned between one semester and two years of college credits. And in Texas, the first cohort of such students graduated in May 2010—900 students from 11 schools, with more than a third of them earning an associate degree.

"We are putting strategies into play to flip the culture and change the attitudes so districts become 'college for all' school districts," said Alma Garcia, a Texas high school project program officer. "[But] to do that, you need to start earlier in a child's life by making the right connections and having the right support systems in place. Then students individually become advocates for themselves."

Special coverage on the alignment between K-12 schools and postsecondary education is supported in part by a grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education, at www.luminafoundation.org.

Gainesville Sun

Alachua eSchool coming to a screen near you

By Jackie Alexander

November 28, 2011 at 6:53 p.m.

Alachua County middle and high school students will be able to take classes with local teachers from their computer screen as part of the Alachua eSchool, a partnership between the school district and Florida Virtual School.

The Florida Virtual School allows each school district to create its own "franchise" in which the curriculum is the same as the virtual schools but all the personnel are local and paid by the school district.

According to the statewide online school, more than 28,368 Florida students were enrolled in franchise schools during the 2010-11 school year, more than 11,000 more students than the previous academic year.

Ed Stefansen, who has worked for Alachua County Public Schools for 18 years, is the eSchool coordinator. The eSchool will begin in January and is open to all students — public, private and home-schooled students.

"It's been a work in progress," he said on Monday.

Stefansen said students will be afforded local technical support and teachers. Four part-time teachers will instruct students in middle and high school math, science, social studies and English.

Stefansen said the district hopes to cap class sizes at 30 students.

One positive for the district, officials said, is that money paid by the state for student enrollment, also known as full-time equivalent funds, will come to the district instead of going to the Florida Virtual School. The \$50 course registration fee will go to the Florida Virtual School.

State FTE funds come in at \$3,400 for a student enrolled in six courses, Johnson said. If a student took an eSchool class who would have otherwise taken a Florida Virtual School class, the district would receive that \$566, which is one-sixth of a full-time student's funding.

According to Florida Virtual School, 1,639 Alachua County students took 3,241 courses during the 2010-11 academic year.

The partnership also will help the district alleviate some of the pressures from class-size requirements, said spokeswoman Jackie Johnson.

Home-schooled students who enroll in the Alachua eSchool have the chance to earn a high school diploma from that school, and home-school parents will have local resources to enhance their lessons, Stefansen said.

"They have the opportunity to become part of the school system by signing up for an Alachua eSchool class," he said.

Stefansen said it will help usher home-schooled students into being part of the greater education community.

New state legislation requires all high school students to take one virtual course as a graduation requirement.

"By 2014, there's not going to be any more textbooks so they're going to have to know how to maneuver digitally in their education," Stefansen said.

ESchool courses on the high school level will be treated as dual enrollment, Stefansen said. Students would be able to use that class period to go to a computer lab or

media center to work on their virtual course.

Marion County Public Schools have owned their franchise since 2006. Spokesman Kevin Christian said 650 students are enrolled in more than 1,250 courses from kindergarten to 12th grade. The district employs 11 full-time teachers and seven adjuncts. "It's one tool we've used in these budget cuts to give kids more opportunities that don't cost as much," he said.

Education Week

Teacher Beat Blog

States' ESEA Waiver Bids Murky on Teacher Evaluations

By [Stephen Sawchuk](#) on November 23, 2011 1:30 PM

Only five of the 11 states that have applied for ESEA waivers have a firm mechanism in place for implementing teacher-evaluation systems statewide, according to a review of the plans.

Those guidelines, and systems for helping districts adopt them in a timely fashion, are the core teacher-quality requirement in the U.S. Department of Education's application.

This isn't a dealbreaker for getting a waiver. At least in theory, states only need to have plans in place regarding evaluations. But plans and requirements are, obviously, two very different things—just ask Hawaii, which won a Race to the Top bid, but [hasn't come to agreement with its teachers' union](#) on evaluations.

It's something that the peer reviewers could take into account as they review the applications, though [the review guidance](#) isn't particularly explicit on this point.

Anyway, without further ado, here's Teacher Beat's rundown.

Colorado, Tennessee, Indiana, Florida, Oklahoma: All five of these states have laws on the books requiring new evaluation systems. Colorado's guidelines have been developed and are now being piloted in select districts. Tennessee's new statewide evaluation system is operational, but has hit bumps in the road of late. Florida's law was extremely controversial and opposed by the state teachers' union. Nevertheless, it is very specific about what the evaluation process will look like. Indiana's law was passed this year, and while piloting is just starting, it has developed a statewide system. Oklahoma's state board is scheduled to adopt a statewide model in December.

Massachusetts: This state has adopted regulations for teacher evaluations that require all districts to create systems based on principles outlined by the state. The success of that all happening seems very dependent on the collective bargaining process, and it's not entirely clear based on my preliminary read how those two factors interact. (Please weigh in if you know more.)

Georgia: This state has statewide guidelines, and it won a Race to the Top grant. But only 26 districts out of about 180 are participating, so the evaluation plans only go that far at the moment. The application states that it will "offer" other districts the chance to adopt the new evaluations next school year (good luck with that one, Georgia!). It says that with the support of the legislature and board of education, all districts will eventually adopt the system. That probably means that the state will need either legislative or regulatory action to make it happen.

New Jersey: This state points to its evaluation task force, which has been drafting principles for evaluation, but there's no mention at all of the state teachers' union, with whom Gov. Chris Christie has constantly feuded. It's hard to see how these evaluations are going to happen absent local bargaining or a state requirement.

Minnesota: The state passed a piece of legislation this year requiring new teacher evaluations statewide, but it is only beginning the process of convening work groups to flesh out the law, which is fairly skeletal. An interesting feature of [this state's law](#) is that it allows for a portfolio-assessment process similar to National Board certification to substitute for the regular observation and student-growth process.

New Mexico: State officials have outlined the contours of an evaluation system, but need the state legislature to pass a law to overhaul its current tiered-licensing system in favor of annual evaluations.

Kentucky: This is an unusual case. According to the application, the state plans to introduce regulations that would allow it to pursue statewide adoption of a model, rather than leaving this up to local districts. An interesting feature of this plan is that, unlike the other applications, it's also quite specific with regard to what activities the state will spend its federal teacher-quality cash on. It explicitly says it wants to move Title II (teacher quality) dollars away from getting teachers to achieve "highly qualified" status and class-size reductions—the primary focus of the funding in most states—into helping teachers become more effective on new evaluation systems.

Education Next

The Future of Educational Accountability, As Envisioned by 11 Leading States

By [Michael Petrilli](#) 11/23/2011

Last week, 11 states applied for waivers from many of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's most onerous provisions. Their applications are now [online](#), ready to be sliced and diced by any willing wonk. (Anne Hyslop of Education Sector has already [taken a cut](#).) We at Fordham have tried to make the task a little bit easier by posting two compilations: First, the [Common Core implementation plans](#) for all 11 states, and second, all of their [accountability proposals](#). Both are huge files but if your plans this weekend include a lot of downtime, have at 'em.

Personally, I'm most interested in the states' plans around accountability. Partly that's because this is the only part of this waiver process that I find [legitimate](#) and [legal](#): the Department of Education has no business demanding that states adopt and implement the Common Core standards or rigorous teacher evaluations. But if it's going to allow states to opt-out of the law's Adequate Yearly Progress system, it certainly has the right to set boundaries around the alternatives. And partly it's because the major sticking point in the current negotiations over ESEA reauthorization comes down to accountability, and how much leeway to give the states.

So what do these 11 states want to do differently on the accountability front? Particularly when it comes to identifying schools that should be subject to some sort of sanctions or interventions? Here's what the future holds if the Department of Education gives its assent:

1. A deadline for getting all kids to "proficiency" will go the way of the dinosaur. None of the states opted to set a deadline for universal proficiency. A few agreed to reduce the number of not-yet-proficient students by 50 percent over the next six years, but most developed their own twist on "annual measurable objectives."

2. A focus on growth will eclipse the need for "subgroup accountability." Models such as the one proposed by Colorado would set "annual measurable objectives" at the kid-level. Schools would be expected to help all students make enough progress to get them to a college-and-career ready standard by high school. (For high achieving students who are already approaching this standard, schools would be held accountable for making sure they grow at least a year's worth of learning every year.) This is exactly the right concept—have a real-live standard (college readiness) and ask schools to aim at getting all kids to it by graduation. That will require making the most rapid progress for the students who are furthest behind. Since those kids are more likely to be poor and from minority groups, it makes subgroup accountability per se unnecessary. (Though the Administration's guidelines still require it.)

3. Subjects beyond reading and math will count again. Seven of the states are taking the opportunity to expand the subjects included in their accountability systems. Colorado will look at writing, science, and ACT results; Florida will add writing and science; Georgia will include science and social studies for grades 3-8 and a whole suite of exit exams for high school; Kentucky and Oklahoma add science, social studies, and writing; and Massachusetts and Tennessee will both add science to the mix. This should be helpful in counteracting the narrowing of the curriculum.

In other words, the states are presenting sensible alternatives to the antiquated Adequate Yearly Progress model. That doesn't prove that "states are good" and "the feds are bad." On the contrary, it just shows that our thinking and technology around accountability have improved over the ten years since NCLB was enacted. But it does lay down a challenge to Arne Duncan, his peer reviewers, and his team: Say yes to these proposals or be accused of a "Washington knows best" mentality.

-Mike Petrilli

Education Next The Nation's Online Learning Omission

By [Bill Tucker](#) 11/21/2011

The Nation's recent online learning expose, [How Online Learning Companies Bought America's Schools](#), in its zeal to connect various dots into a narrative of a corporate public education takeover, makes critical errors. It falsely equates K-12 online learning with privatization, leading to an incomplete and flawed political analysis. More importantly though, the article makes a credibility-killing factual omission. Here's how the article describes online education in Florida:

If the national movement to "reform" public education through vouchers, charters and privatization has a laboratory, it is Florida. It was one of the first states to undertake a program of "virtual schools"—charters operated online, with teachers instructing students over the Internet—as well as one of the first to use vouchers to channel taxpayer money to charter schools run by for-profits....

In Florida, only fourteen months after Crist handed a major victory to teachers unions, a new governor, Rick Scott, signed a radical bill that could have the effect of replacing hundreds of teachers with computer avatars. Scott, a favorite of the Tea Party, appointed Levesque as one of his education advisers. His education law expanded the Florida Virtual School to grades K-5, authorized the spending of public funds on new for-profit virtual schools and created a requirement that all high school students take at least one online course before graduation....

A combination of factors has made this year what Moe calls an "inflection point" in the march toward public school privatization. For one thing, recession-induced fiscal crises and austerity have pressured states to cut spending. In some cases, as in Florida, where educating students at the Florida Virtual School costs nearly \$2,500 less than at traditional schools, such reform has been sold as a budget fix.

But, here's what the article left out: [Florida Virtual School](#), which is prominently connected with privatization in four separate paragraphs of the article, is not a private corporation. It is, instead, a state-owned and state-run institution. There are no shareholders. There are, though, real, live teachers. Led by a former elementary school teacher, the school employs over a 1,000 state certified teachers, almost all of whom have also taught in traditional classrooms. It is fully accredited by two major agencies: [The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools \(SACS\)](#) and [The Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation](#). And, while it is not a charter school, it was the country's first state-wide Internet-based public high school and has enrolled hundreds of thousands of public school students since 1997.

Florida Virtual School is, in short, a poster child for public sector innovation.

But none of that fit into author Fang's narrative. It would have made a simple story into the complex one that it is.

K-12 online learning is vast and varied, crossing both political and ideological lines. Programs range from [Stanford Online High School](#) to [specialized dropout prevention high schools run in partnership with community-based nonprofits](#) to [Rocketship](#), which plows savings from technology into extended learning opportunities and higher teacher salaries, to the [North Carolina Virtual Public School](#), a signature program of Democratic Governor Bev Purdue (launched when she was the state's Lt. Governor). Full-time virtual schools, the majority of which are run under contract to a for-profit schooling company, are part of this landscape. So, too, are numerous traditional school districts — including those who run their own programs and those who oversee contracts with private providers.

Within this landscape, as in any new arena, there are areas of serious concern. Among full-time online learning programs, what we know of performance is decidedly mixed. And, Fang's article is correct to point out the moneyed influence and [lack of transparency](#) from operators like Ohio's White Hat Management. We've been [writing about these issues](#) for several years.

But, just as alternative energy should not be defined by Solyndra, neither should online learning be defined by White Hat. Strong oversight to ensure both high quality learning experiences and accountability for public funds is essential. So, too, is knowledgeable and objective reporting.

St. Pete Times
Pinellas school tax proponents prepare for 2012 renewal campaign
By Rebecca Catalanello, Times Staff Writer
Thursday, December 1, 2011

TARPON SPRINGS — Business leaders involved with a leading Pinellas County education fundraising group say they will aggressively campaign next year to renew a property tax to help public schools.

Bob McIntyre, CEO of DYTEK Corp., and Craig Sher, executive chairman of the Sembler Co. of St. Petersburg, said Wednesday that they are committed to raising money to support the renewal of a tax that generates roughly \$30 million a year for the county's public schools.

"To lose that referendum would be catastrophic," Sher said.

The pair made the comments after a Pinellas County Education Foundation event. They said the campaign will be separate from the foundation because election rules prohibit nonprofit groups from political campaigning.

Speaking at a luncheon organized by the foundation, Pinellas County School District superintendent John Stewart pointed out that county voters overwhelmingly approved the half-mill tax — by 64 percent in 2004 and 70 percent in 2008.

This time, he warned, it could be tougher.

"Not a healthy environment to be asking for a renewal of a referendum," Stewart said.

The tax, which funds \$3,000 toward every teacher's salary and has funded the expansion of the district's arts, reading and technology programs, expires June 30, 2013.

Without a renewal, supporters warn, schools will suffer.

"Though no one likes to pay taxes," Sher said, "it has been shown there's a direct connection from the money raised to good things in education. So we have to raise money to publicize that."

It's still very early.

Campaign organizers have not even decided whether to place the referendum on the Aug. 14, 2012, primary ballot or to attach it to the hefty Nov. 6, 2012, general election.

Beth Rawlins, chairperson of the political action committee supporting the campaign, said she hopes to reach a fundraising goal on par with years past, upward of \$50,000.

"I'm still convinced this is something the people of Pinellas County support," she said.

Kim Black, president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association, said she expects members of her group will also play an active role in support of the measure as it has in the past.

"Our teachers are the best ones to tell the story about all the things this referendum does for our students."

In 2010 the money went toward things like the expansion of reading classrooms and reading texts, instruments and art supplies, whiteboards and online curriculum development, according to a 2010 report from the Independent Citizens Referendum Oversight Committee, a seven-person group mandated by the ballot language to monitor how the tax dollars are spent.

McIntyre said the district's arts programs rely on that funding.

"As much as I'm concerned about the salaries for the teachers, which I think they absolutely deserve, I'm as concerned about the arts programs that would be lost without this," he said. "I wonder how many students are sitting in programs right now that if it wasn't for this referendum they wouldn't be sitting in those programs."

Sun-Sentinel

Coral Springs family sues Broward school district after bullying episode

Mother says Ramblewood sixth-grader attempted suicide after inadequate school response

Michael Mayo, Sun Sentinel Columnist

7:45 PM EST, November 30, 2011

As a sixth-grader at Ramblewood Middle School in Coral Springs earlier this year, Brianne Vanderheyden was allegedly called "Pinocchio nose," "white slut" and other nasty names by classmates. Her mother Randi said the bullying got so bad, her daughter became depressed and attempted suicide.

Now the family is suing the Broward school district for negligence, claiming administrators failed to protect Brianne and took inadequate steps against her tormentors. Some, including the apparent instigator, were boys.

"She spoke up at the beginning, and it got worse," Randi Vanderheyden said Wednesday. "We wanted the bullies removed, and Brianne is the one who had to leave."

The suit claims Brianne was a victim of "hate crimes and discrimination based on her race and gender." The family is seeking unspecified damages for emotional distress and medical bills.

Broward school district spokeswoman Nadine Drew said the situation is "under investigation, but we don't comment on pending litigation."

Brianne, 13, is now enrolled in "virtual school," taking online classes at home, after a transfer to Sawgrass Middle School didn't work out because the school district wouldn't provide bus transportation.

"She's isolated," Randi Vanderheyden said. "She misses her friends. This has been really hard for her."

I'm having a hard time with this case, on many levels.

Part of me is sympathetic to the girl's plight, part of me is skeptical about the family's story and litigiousness, and part of me is sad to see a familiar name caught up in the saga, portrayed as the insensitive authority figure.

That would be Ramblewood principal Tina Recchi.

Longtime Sun Sentinel readers might remember her as the wife of former lifestyle columnist Ray Recchi, who died of cancer at 51 in 1999. She is a 30-year educator and a former teacher of the year who has been Ramblewood's principal the last five years.

Randi Vanderheyden said Recchi "seemed more concerned about appearances" than handling her daughter's problem. Vanderheyden said that at a March meeting, Recchi told her Brianne "needs to get a thicker skin."

"I was outraged," Vanderheyden said. "I felt like she was protecting the bullies and blaming the victim. It seemed like she just wanted to cover it up to make the problem go away."

Recchi declined comment, saying she's not allowed to speak because of the lawsuit.

At this point, it's important to remember that claims in a lawsuit aren't necessarily facts. The complaint, filed Oct. 28 by attorney Reginald Clyne, said that Brianne was "an anglo-saxon and attended a school that was comprised predominantly of other races." According to last year's school district figures, Ramblewood was 62.5 percent white.

Back in my school days, the best way to confront bullies was to stand up to them. And picking on the opposite sex was a no-no.

"It used to be punch 'em in the nose, but that's not the way it works anymore," said Clyne. "Now you're supposed to tell your parents and the school is supposed to do something about it. That didn't happen in this case."

Sorry, but the jury's still out on that.

Inside Higher Education

[Committee on Measures of Student Success issues final report](#)

Submitted by Libby A. Nelson

November 30, 2011 - 3:00am

WASHINGTON – After more than a year of study, a federal committee is urging the Education Department to change how it tracks and evaluates graduation rates and other measures of success for students at community colleges.

One of the recommendations, if endorsed by Education Secretary Arne Duncan, would create a combined "graduation and transfer" rate that includes students who graduate from a two-year college as well as those who do not graduate but do go on to a four-year institution. That move would be a victory for community colleges, who have argued that counting only those students who earn degrees makes community colleges appear less successful than they really are.

[The report](#) [3], from the federal Committee on Measures of Student Success, was [more than a year in the making](#) [4]. It addresses a variety of issues that can make measuring student completion rates at community colleges difficult, providing guidelines on collecting data on students who transfer, part-time students, students who need remedial classes, and other groups.

And while its recommendations are aimed only at two-year colleges for now, they could eventually affect four-year institutions as well, whether through an overhaul of the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System or an expansion of recommendations on learning outcomes and employment to apply to all colleges.

The 14-member committee was formed to deal with a requirement in the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that two-year colleges report their completion rates to the federal government. But other measures of success proved more controversial during the committee's year of meetings, especially students' learning outcomes and employment after graduation.

At a meeting in September, originally intended to be the committee's last, members clashed over whether a recommendation that the Education Department "encourage institutions to voluntarily collect, disclose and report ... measures of student learning and employment" was sufficient. Representatives of community colleges strongly opposed any effort to expand the "gainful employment" rule, which evaluates vocational programs based on their students' employment after graduation.

The final report recommends that the department provide incentives to institutions to measure student learning and employment, but stops short of recommending an expansion of gainful employment. At the committee's final meeting Tuesday, members said it was an adequate compromise.

Harold Levy, a former New York City schools chancellor and managing director of Palm Ventures, who had advocated for stronger recommendations on measuring employment outcomes, described the final report as a "model of conciliation and compromise."

The report's recommendations include specific changes, mostly to data collection, that members said could be accomplished without new legislation: collecting completion data on part-time, degree-seeking students, students who require remedial courses, and students receiving federal financial aid, among others. The committee also calls for technical assistance to clarify what commonly used terms like "degree-seeking" or "substantial preparation for transfer" actually mean.

Community colleges largely praised these provisions. Including students who transfer in the completion rate would almost double the current rate, increasing it from 22 percent to 40 percent, said David Baime, vice president for government relations at the American Association of Community Colleges.

"AACC has long maintained that the exclusion of transfer from the federal graduation rate has created a grossly distorted, and overly negative, picture of community college performance, given the centrality of transfer preparation to the community college mission," the organization said in a statement.

Baime noted that many of the recommendations were similar to the Voluntary Framework of Accountability, an effort by the association to develop common standards for community college success. "Over all, we think it's a very positive development for us," he said. "The diagnosis of the problems, the issues that surfaced, they're saying, 'This you can do easily, this is more difficult' – I think they pretty much got the whole thing kind of right."

Still, the association took issue with a few of the suggestions, saying that trying to measure success for students who require remedial classes as a separate group would encounter methodological obstacles: some students take remedial courses only in one subject area, for example. "We disagree with the policy conceptually, but also we don't really think it will work," Baime said.

Students who transfer to other two-year institutions should also be considered in completion rates, they said.

The true test of the committee's report will lie in whether its recommendations are implemented. Some were vague, including the proposed "incentives" for colleges to disclose data and collaborate on measuring student learning outcomes and employment.

Others would require legislative change, including a recommendation that addressed an old controversy: the creation of a federal "unit record" database that would track students from state to state and from college to careers. A previous effort to do so [failed after encountering strong opposition](#) [5] from Congressional Republicans, independent colleges, and others, but the committee urged the department to try again during the next renewal of the Higher Education Act.

"Efforts at linking state data systems are uneven, and progress is slow," the committee wrote in its report, calling a federal database an "ideal solution."

The Education Department plans to create an action plan based on the committee's recommendations in early January. The committee's chairman, Thomas Bailey, a professor of economics and education at Columbia University's Teachers College, described the report as the "midpoint of a long road."

"We've acknowledged there is still a lot of work to do," Bailey said.

A final draft of the report, with minor changes from the draft version approved Tuesday, will be submitted to Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Congress in the coming weeks.

Ocala Star Banner

Fired school employee files racial discrimination suit

By Joe Callahan

Wednesday, November 30, 2011 at 4:40 p.m.

A former Marion County school teacher fired for what the district called excessive absenteeism has filed a federal racial discrimination lawsuit against the School Board.

The lawsuit was filed Nov. 23, six days after the School Board officially fired Brenda Williams and 19 months after Superintendent of Schools Jim Yancey first recommended her firing.

Williams had been on unpaid leave since Yancey issued her a termination letter on April 23, 2009, according to documents included as part of a School Board meeting agenda.

Williams requested a hearing, and the School Board has since scheduled several hearings, asking for Williams to provide documentation to support her claim that she missed excessive days due to an unspecified medical condition.

On Nov. 17, she did not show up for a hearing and was fired.

"We can not talk about pending lawsuits," said Philip Leppert, executive director for human resources. In fact, Leppert said he was unaware that a federal discrimination lawsuit had been filed.

School district documents from 2009 indicate Williams was repeatedly warned to start coming to work, unless she had prior approval to be absent. When she failed to follow orders, Yancey decided to fire Williams.

At the time, Williams retained Winter Park attorney Gary Wilson, who wrote Williams requested a hearing, adding "grounds may exist for a potential handicap/disability discrimination claim."

Since then, Williams' hired another attorney, Jay F. Romano of Romano Law Center in Coral Springs. Romano writes in the lawsuit that Williams, who is black, was the victim of racial discrimination.

Romano did not return calls, and Williams could not be reached for comment.

The lawsuit alleges the school district passed over Williams for promotion in favor of four white employees during her career. The lawsuit was filed with the U.S. District Court, Middle District of Florida.

Since the beginning of Williams' employment "she has never been offered a supervisory position, even though she has been with the company for 23 years," the lawsuit states.

The lawsuit also alleges that Williams was treated unfairly due to her race, stating that white supervisors disciplined her more harshly for "mistakes" than they did in regards to white co-workers.

Williams also claims that school district administrators created a hostile work environment during her final days as a Howard Middle School teacher.

Williams alleges in the lawsuit that Kathy Collins, the then-Howard principal who has since retired, was working in the car pickup line on April 16, 2009, when Williams heard her say: "Oh, slavery is not over!"

The lawsuit alleges many other employees and co-workers made harsh remarks about her, or in front of her, including "Whiteboard training sounds better," during a discussion of blackboard training. Williams' suit also quotes another employee as saying "Brenda runs a slave trade at her house," with no elaboration.

Romano wrote that Williams is seeking a supervisor position with the district, attorney fees and back pay, including interest and all applicable raises. The lawsuit states compensation should exceed \$50,000.

School district documents from 2009 state that Williams' absenteeism began after she was transferred from the staff development office back to the classroom for the 2008-09 school year due to budget cuts.

Williams had been a teacher from 1986 until 2006, when she was moved to staff development.

Yancey's termination letter states Williams was absent often at her new Howard Middle teaching job and eventually used up all of her sick and personal leave days. She then incurred absences of more than 125 hours, the letter added.

On March 3, 2009, Collins issued a written order addressing absenteeism, which Williams refused to sign. Collins wrote that if Williams missed any more days that she should request a medical leave of absence, the letter states.

Collins also requested medical documentation to support Williams' claim that she had a medical condition. After that order was issued, Williams missed eight consecutive days of work, according to the letter.

After being suspended for one week without pay, Williams informed Collins on April 16, 2009, that she would not be at work the following day, thus would not help with an assigned presentation to the Kiwanis Club.

Collins told Williams to meet in her office after school. Instead, school officials say, Williams left campus. Collins immediately contacted human resources and Yancey, who wrote that Williams' actions were "wilful insubordination."

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