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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 4/27/11

For more education news, visit *The Ed Fly* at [www.TheEdFly.com](http://www.TheEdFly.com).

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## NATIONAL NEWS

# Jeb Bush Leads Broad Push for Education Change With 'Florida Formula'

New York Times

By: Trip Gabriel

April 26, 2011

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/education/27bush.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/27/education/27bush.html?_r=2)

ST. PAUL — With the dust settling on legislative sessions around the country, 2011 is shaping up as one of the most consequential years in memory for changes in the way schools are run.

The new policies have many champions, but a little-known common denominator behind sweeping measures in nearly a dozen states is [Jeb Bush](#), the former Florida governor, who has re-emerged as an adviser to governors and lawmakers, mostly Republicans, who are interested in imitating what he calls “the Florida formula” for education.

Mr. Bush, for example, has been closely involved in new education bills and laws in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Utah. One out of five state school superintendents have joined a group that his national foundation created, [Chiefs for Change](#), to rally behind a common agenda.

He has hopped around the country to campaign for candidates, hold meetings and lobby for Florida-style changes. They include private-school vouchers, online courses and requiring third-graders to pass reading tests before they move up to fourth grade, rather than being pushed along with their peers — or “social promotion.”

“We’re the only state to have eliminated social promotion in the third grade in a robust way,” Mr. Bush said Tuesday in an appearance in the Capitol here, urging the Legislature’s new Republican majorities to be bold.

He came to support measures introduced after 30 Minnesota lawmakers, mostly freshmen Republicans, had attended a Washington summit meeting in December organized by Mr. Bush’s [Foundation for Excellence in Education](#).

The nonprofit group received contributions of \$2.9 million in 2009, from the foundations of [Bill Gates](#) and [Eli Broad](#), among others, and for-profit education technology companies.

“Jeb Bush gives voice to those who want to change the system,” said State Representative Pat Garofalo, a Republican who is chairman of the Minnesota House education finance panel.

With a new Democratic governor, Mark Dayton, looking for common ground, Mr. Garofalo predicted, “you’ve got what’s going to be a very good session for education reform in Minnesota.”

The most complete adoption of Mr. Bush’s approach has been in Indiana, where Gov. [Mitch Daniels](#)’s education talking points in his State of the State speech closely echoed a mission statement of Mr. Bush’s foundation.

“We were able to really use many of their policy positions and implement many of their policies to drive pieces of our reform agenda,” said Tony Bennett, Indiana’s schools superintendent.

Mr. Bush, 58, scoffs at the idea of running for the office that both his brother and father held.

Still, his name gives him extra appeal among state politicians — “the Jeb cocktail,” as Jay P. Greene, a professor of education at the [University of Arkansas](#), put it. “Jeb Bush lurks out there as a potential presidential candidate some day,” he added.

Although Mr. Bush mostly collaborates with Republicans, there is bipartisan support for elements of his ideas in some places, including the Obama administration. He and [President Obama](#) made a joint appearance at a Miami school last month.

And Mr. Bush has teamed up with a former Democratic governor of West Virginia, [Bob Wise](#), to promote online education.

"I watched him at a function in Orlando with educators ranging from classroom teachers to academicians, and he held his own at every level," Mr. Wise said. "This is someone spending his time on education because he believes passionately in it."

Mr. Bush said that although he was a "head-banging, limited-government conservative," education was one area that needed not be so ideological. "I'm not running for anything," he said in an interview. "These are long-term strategies and take patience to get the results we need as a nation. I have a background from which I can express my views."

His influence derives from his two terms starting in 1999, during which Florida elementary school pupils began achieving significantly higher test scores. Whether his policies were entirely responsible is debated by experts.

Mr. Bush put in place many new policies, often over strong objections from teachers' unions. One change, offering private-school vouchers to students in public schools that earned failing grades on the state's A-to-F report card, was struck down by the Florida Supreme Court in 2006. (Two narrower voucherlike programs remain.)

In Minnesota, Mr. Bush cited the improvement of Florida fourth-graders on national reading tests. They progressed from below the national average in 1992 to above in 2009 on the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#). Hispanic fourth-graders read better than the average of all students in 31 other states.

David Figlio, a professor of education and social policy at [Northwestern University](#), said that because of Florida's accountability measures, which are more nuanced than the national [No Child Left Behind](#) standards, "early-year literacy and numeracy skills seem to be improving, especially for schools that serve disadvantaged populations."

But that progress erodes as students age. By eighth grade, Florida students begin to lose their advantage on the NAEP, and by 12th grade, they fall behind national averages.

"If kids graduated from fourth grade, I think he would have been an unqualified success," said Sherman Dorn, an education professor at the University of South Florida.

Skeptics point out that other changes could explain the improvements in test scores. In 2002, voters passed one of the nation's most ambitious class-size reduction plans, over the objections of Mr. Bush. School financing, including for reading coaches, also rose.

"Don't you think maybe those things had more to do with improvements than grading schools A through F?" said Representative Mindy Greiling, the ranking Democrat on the Minnesota House education finance panel, who calls the Florida-style changes favored by Republicans in her state "rinky-dink."

"I don't know why they're so enamored with him or with Florida," Ms. Greiling said of Mr. Bush.

The former governor countered that the gains began before class-size reductions. In the Capitol, he displayed a chart showing that while Minnesota's fourth-grade reading scores on the national test had been flat for years, Florida's had climbed.

"That's not because of the sunshine," he said.

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## Duncan Backs Delaware for Withholding District's RTTT Funds

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

April 25, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/04/duncan\\_sides\\_with\\_delaware\\_on.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/04/duncan_sides_with_delaware_on.html)

In a warning to districts that want to backtrack on their Race to the Top promises, Education Secretary Arne Duncan is publicly supporting state officials in Delaware who plan to withhold \$11 million from the Christina School District for [reneging](#) on school-turnaround plans.

Duncan's statement issued this evening marks the first time he's had to take sides as 12 states and their participating districts work to implement the \$4 billion in Race to the Top awards.

"Because Christina has backtracked on that commitment, the state of Delaware has made the tough but courageous decision to withhold Race to The Top funding. I believe that is the right decision," Duncan said.

Districts have certainly [backed out of Race to the Top before](#), but in Christina's case, the district wants to change its plans for turning around two low-performing schools—and not move some teachers out as they had originally promised. But they still want to [keep their money](#). These turnaround plans were part of the district's agreement, in exchange for Race to the Top prize money. Now, the school board president, John Young, says the dollars are creating more ["chaos"](#) than good. (It's important to note that districts *volunteered* to participate in Race to the Top.)

UPDATE [4/26]: And Young wasn't too happy about Duncan's involvement in the issue, according to this [local news story](#).

State schools' chief Lillian M. Lowery [put the responsibility](#) for this back on the district: "The Christina School District developed its reform plan and sought federal/state financial assistance to make the plan a reality," she said. "The Christina School Board now seeks to back away from the very plan that resulted in the awarding of these funds."

This public squabble involves Delaware, a Race to the Top darling that was [one of two winners](#) in the first round. Duncan heaped generous amounts of praise on the state for its widespread buy-in from teachers, public officials, and community leaders. It's only a matter of time before other Race to the Top states confront issues like what Delaware is dealing with.

To be sure, implementing Race to the Top is [messy business](#). There are many lofty promises to keep and grand expectations to meet. Duncan clearly wants to get out in front of this and let everyone know that he intends to support those, like Delaware, who are trying to turn their ambitious plans into reality. And his statement tonight also puts everyone on notice that he's willing to issue verbal "no-no"s when parties misbehave.

Here's the text of Duncan's entire statement:

Thanks to the commitment of states like Delaware, Race to the Top has helped drive unprecedented change in education across the country. Through the bold leadership of Governor Markell, Delaware State Education Association President Diane Donahue, and State Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery, Delaware is showing America what's possible when adults come together to do the right thing for kids. Reform isn't easy. Districts, like Christina, which signed on to the Race to the Top plan, made a commitment to dramatically improve the lives of children. Because Christina has backtracked on that commitment, the state of Delaware has made the tough but courageous decision to withhold Race to The Top funding. I believe that is the right decision. And I support the Governor's commitment to reform and his courage in challenging the status quo for children trapped in chronically underperforming schools. I hope that the Christina School Board will reconsider its decision.

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **40,000 may have to take algebra test that counts for nothing**

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

April 26, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-algebra-exam-20110426.0.2392775.story>

It's as if they are caught in a real-life version of that classic bad dream, the one where you must sit for a final exam in a course you didn't take.

Nearly 40,000 Florida students may have to take the state's new standardized algebra 1 exam next month, though they aren't enrolled in algebra. They have taken and passed an algebra 1 course but that happened a year, or more, ago.

These teenagers — most now taking geometry or algebra 2 — are caught in a complicated glitch created by federal and state testing laws.

The result: They may take a 160-minute exam that will have no impact on their academic records and no consequences for their schools. Taking the test, however, will fulfill a federal rule that students take a standardized, high-school math exam before graduation.

A few months ago, the federal government agreed Florida could exempt the group of 39,600 students from the testing requirements, and therefore the algebra exam, but those mandates were written into Florida law, too.

So unless the Florida Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott act quickly to pass and sign a bill that repeals those rules, these students soon will find themselves working to solve some 65 algebra problems. In Central Florida, algebra testing is slated for the week of May 16.

"It's been a year since I've taken algebra," said Matheo Carmona, 15, a ninth-grader at Lake Nona High in Orange County. "Everybody just doesn't like it."

Matheo, in honors geometry this year, said most of his classmates are unhappy they might take the new algebra exam because they took a countywide algebra final last spring.

"If I had to take it again, it's going to make me mad," he added.

Teachers and administrators wish lawmakers had acted more quickly, so they weren't just weeks away from testing and still not sure who was taking the exam.

"We still don't know what's happening. That is difficult," said Rob Anderson, Lake Nona's principal.

The students in the maybe-test group took algebra in middle school and are their districts' strongest math students. But

educators said the algebra test still will worry some and annoy plenty.

"Some kids are frustrated — here's another test they've got take," said Sam Momary, principal of Seminole County's Hagerty High, where more than 300 ninth-graders wait on the test decision. "For the most part, they accept it."

Educators also are worried that the uncertainty for the group might muddy the message for the more than 200,000 students now enrolled in algebra 1. The latter must take the new exam and, if they are in ninth grade, the new test counts for 30 percent of their final grade.

The algebra exam, to be given on computers, is Florida's first foray into end-of-course exams. These tests — geometry and biology come next — will replace high-school versions of the math and science sections of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

Most educators say a single-subject exam makes more sense for high school than the broad, multi-subject FCAT. But transferring from one system to another has caused headaches.

Here's what happened: The federal No Child Left Behind law requires states to give at least one standardized high-school math test. For years in Florida, that has been the FCAT, with math exams given in ninth and 10th grades.

But last year, Florida lawmakers decided to phase out those FCAT exams and replace them with end-of-course tests. Then, they realized that for the group of students who had taken algebra between the 2007-08 and 2009-10, there would be no standardized math test. They were already through algebra, and the high-school FCAT math exams would be gone.

So to satisfy the federal rules, legislators wrote their law so that group of 40,000 had to take the algebra 1 exam this year. The test wouldn't count for those students' grades or graduation requirements, nor would it be part of their schools' A-to-F grade calculations. But it would satisfy federal law.

The Florida Department of Education realized it wasn't an ideal plan, so in the fall it applied for a waiver from its counterpart in Washington, D.C. The U.S. Department of Education granted that in January, exempting the already-passed-algebra group from the high-school testing requirement this year.

But Florida's law needed to be changed, too. Bills filed in both the House and Senate would do that, but, to date, they haven't passed both chambers. If they do, then the bill needs the governor's signature to become law.

Districts had to select a week — within the state's three-week approved window — to give the algebra exam, and some will start testing May 9.

Cindy Schmitt, chairman of the Lake Nona math department, has tried not to discuss the test uncertainty too much with her geometry students.

For some, it would "throw them into panic mode," she said. "It doesn't matter if it doesn't count, they just have the drive and the motivation to get it done."

The algebra-exam problem won't be repeated. In coming years, students' scores on end-of-course exams will be "banked," so exams taken in middle school will count for federal reporting purposes as the required high-school math test.

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## Florida preschool enrollment tops in U.S.

Palm Beach Post

By: Jason Schultz

April 26, 2011

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/schools/florida-preschool-enrollment-tops-in-u-s-1433623.html>

Florida has one of the nation's highest percentages of 4-year-olds in preschool programs, according to a study released today by a nonprofit educational foundation connected to Rutgers University. But state and local spending on those programs is among the worst in the nation.

"The problem in Florida isn't quantity, it's quality," said W. Steven Barnett, co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, which released the State of Preschool 2010 report.

The study ranked the 40 states that have voluntary preschool programs, where 3- or 4-year-olds can get free access to public preschool programs.

Florida's program is available only to 4-year-olds, but the study showed that in the 2009-10 school year Florida had the second-highest percentage of eligible children enrolled in preschool programs. The state's program is available to all children, while many states focus on those from impoverished households.

Based on the amount of combined federal, state and local money spent per preschool student, Florida ranked 37th.

And Florida's programs met only three of the 10 quality standards used as benchmarks.

The state's programs had an adequate number of site visits for monitoring, had comprehensive early learning standards and had classes smaller than 20 students.

On standards such as having teachers with specialized preschool training and having adequate meals for students, the programs in Florida failed, according to the study.

"When you only meet three out of 10 standards, you have a problem," Barnett said.

The state's low ranking didn't surprise Palm Beach County School Board members.

Board member Chuck Shaw said the district does all it can to provide preschool programs for children but is hampered by a lack of money from the state legislature.

"There is no way we can come up with more funding ourselves," Shaw said. "It would have to come from the state, but the legislature has not paid attention to pre-K funding."

Tana Ebbole, chief executive officer of the Children's Services Council, said there are some quality preschool programs in the county, but bringing all programs to that level would require more training for teachers.

Ebbole estimated that Palm Beach County gets about \$2,500 from the state per preschool student. To create quality programs with properly trained and supported teachers would cost about \$5,583 per student, she said.

Because federal stimulus money ends after this year, more than \$1 million is being lost for free enrichment programs at 18 schools with mostly low-income students, said M.J. Steele, the school district's early childhood education director. Several other schools also have extra enrichment programs for preschoolers, but parents have to pay \$95 a week.

School Board Chairman Frank Barbieri said the district would find other money to keep preschool programs going despite the lost stimulus money. He cited the importance of those classes.

State Department of Education spokeswoman Deborah Higgins could not provide a response to the Rutgers study because the department had not had a chance to review it.

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Oklahoma House passes private school tax credits measure**

The Oklahoman

By: Michael McNutt

April 27, 2011

<http://newsok.com/oklahoma-house-passes-private-school-tax-credits-measure/article/3562285#ixzz1Kit8GfEI>

Tax credits would be established to provide money for private school scholarships under a bill approved Tuesday by the House.

Senate Bill 969 would allow companies to donate as much as \$100,000 to a nonprofit organization that would award the scholarships. Couples could donate up to \$2,000, while individuals could donate up to \$1,000.

The measure would allow a tax credit equal to 50 percent of the total amount of contribution to a nonprofit, scholarship-granting organization. The organizations would have to be formed if the measure becomes law.

For the most part, eligible public school students would be able to seek a maximum annual scholarship of \$5,000. Students with special needs could receive up to \$25,000 a year. The scholarships would be for public school students in low-income families or in low-performing schools.

The House passed the measure by a vote of 64-33. It goes back to the Senate.

Opponents, mostly Democrats, argued against the measure, saying it would be a tax voucher.

"This is not a voucher," said [Rep. Lee Denney](#), the House author of SB 969. "This is not public money going to private schools. This is private dollars going to private schools."

Minority Leader Scott Inman, D-[Del City](#), said the \$5,000 scholarship for most public school students in urban areas would not be enough to cover tuition costs of private schools.

But Denney, R-Cushing, said the scholarship would be a help to most families and that some private schools do have tuition close to \$5,000.

"A child could select a school that this would make a huge impact on the tuition," she said.

Others argued that SB 969 would take away revenue from the state. The tax credits are projected to cost the state about \$4 million of revenue in the 2013 fiscal year, \$11 million the next year and \$5 million for each subsequent year.

Denny said it wouldn't have an actual effect on the state's revenue because of existing tax practices.

"The money going to these scholarship programs is money the state would never have received anyway since it would have been sheltered through other tax breaks already on the books," Denney said. "By providing citizens a way to obtain the same tax breaks while also benefiting needy children in both urban and rural areas, we are maximizing the use of those dollars to benefit poor children who would otherwise be denied the education they desperately need to break the cycle of poverty and create a better life for their families."

Overall, the bill provides for a maximum \$5 million in annual credits allowed — \$3.5 million would go to individual scholarships, while the remaining \$1.5 million would fund grants to help rural schools in areas where private school is not an option.

SB 969 would allow donors to give similar amounts to most rural schools. The money would be given to nonprofit groups or foundations that support public schools; public schools would apply for money to be used to offer courses not in the school district's budget.

Eligible public schools would have to be more than 10 miles away from a private school and have an enrollment of 4,200 or less.

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## **Former Fla. Gov. Jeb Bush talks education with Minn. lawmakers, DFLers reject suggestions**

Associated Press

By: Chris Williams

April 26, 2011

<http://www.startribune.com/local/120708134.html>

ST. PAUL, Minn. - The lessons learned from a system of education reforms that improved low test scores and dismal graduation rates in Florida schools could benefit Minnesota, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush told Minnesota lawmakers Tuesday.

Republican leaders in the Minnesota House and Senate invited Bush to present his education reforms, hoping to build momentum for replicating some of the policies in Minnesota. Some leading Democrats were quick to disagree.

"We are happy to steal great ideas," House Speaker Kurt Zellers, R-Maple Grove, said after the presentation.

The main House education bill already contains a voucher program for low-income students and would create a school performance rating system similar to one in Florida. The bill's backers hope the measures can help shrink the academic achievement gap between the state's racial minorities and their wealthier peers.

Bush, who was governor of Florida from 1999-2007, said the state had improved its schools and the academic performance of its students, particularly non-whites, by enacting several reforms at the same time then making sure they were well funded.

Those included giving schools easily understood letter grades from A to F. Schools that graded out poorly were embarrassed while those that earned As got extra state money.

Third-graders who couldn't read weren't promoted to the next grade, which held back 13 percent of the class in 2002-2003. But, he said, that percentage has since dropped.

He said Florida also embraced the use of vouchers to make it easier for students, particularly the poor and those needing special education, to leave failing schools. Bush said the threat of mobile students proved to be "a catalytic converter for improving public schools."

Bush touted the benefits of the state's program for preschool, for which all 4-year-olds are eligible. He said it helped those students show up at kindergarten ready to learn.

He encouraged Minnesota to follow Florida's lead and embrace Web-based learning, in which students can move at their own pace through content developed by the best teachers in their fields.

Bush said that in the 1990s Florida students who tested well below the national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a national test that allows comparison between states, now beat the national average on fourth and eighth grade reading tests. Minnesota's most recent scores were among the top 10 in both grades.

He said Florida high school graduation rates at the start of the decade were among the very lowest in the nation, but they are now about average at 65 percent.

That significantly trails Minnesota, where about 86 percent of students graduate, one of the highest rates in the nation,

according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Minnesota's average scores on the ACT are also among the nation's best, while Florida's are among the lowest.

Democrats who sit on education committees in the state Senate and House said the differences between the states make Florida-style reforms unnecessary in Minnesota.

"Comparing Minnesota to Florida is apples to oranges, with oranges being Florida," said Rep. Chuck Wiger, D-Maplewood. "We are not one of those southern states. We are Minnesota and we're proud to have the highest graduation rate in America."

Rep. Carlos Mariani, D-St. Paul, said Bush neglected to mention that in 2002 voters approved a constitution amendment that limits class sizes to no more than 18 students in early grades.

"The common people in the state of Florida, just like the common people here, understand that if you under-resource something you get what you pay for," he said.

Joe Nathan, director for the Center for School Change at Macalester College, attended Bush's presentation. He said he thought many of the former governor's ideas could be good for Minnesota, even if the details might have to be tweaked.

In particular, he liked Florida's system for rating schools.

"I think it would be good for Minnesota," he said. "It would help students and parents choose schools wisely and serve as an incentive for improvement."

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## Don't Mess With Texas' Sovereignty Over Standards and Tests

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

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[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/04/dont\\_mess\\_with\\_texas\\_sovereign.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/04/dont_mess_with_texas_sovereign.html)

Sure, we've heard truckloads of skepticism about the common standards in some places as an intrusion into local education decisions. But how many states actually draft legislation to forbid state or local boards from adopting them? Texas, whose [state song](#) boasts of being an "emblem of freedom," did just that.

[House Bill 2923](#), which is [making its way](#) through the state legislature there, would amend the state education code to bar the state board of education or local district boards from adopting "national curriculum standards." In case that reference wasn't clear enough, the bill goes on to say that such standards "include any curriculum standards endorsed, approved, sanctioned or promoted by the United States Department of Education, the National Governors Association, or the Council of Chief State School Officers."

And just to cover any uncovered bases: "No school district or open-enrollment charter school may be required to offer any aspect of a national curriculum." The state board can't adopt any criterion-referenced tests based on national curriculum standards either, the bill says.

Texas, you might recall, was one of two states that [didn't join](#) the Common Core State Standards Initiative at its inception, and continues to boycott the movement. It's one of six states that hasn't adopted the final standards, and one of five that haven't joined either of the two big consortia of states designing assessments for the standards. The proposed legislation, it seems, would make darn sure that this remains the case.

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