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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/12/11

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## **NATIONAL NEWS**

### **Scope of Federal Role at Issue in Senate ESEA Discussions**

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

May 11, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/05/senate\\_esea\\_discussions.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/05/senate_esea_discussions.html)

So you may have noticed by now that the Senate education committee blew its initial Easter deadline for getting a bill reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to markup.

One of the major points under discussion is just what percentage of schools should be subject to what sort of federal sanctions and labeling. (More on that [here](#).)

To recap, the administration's ESEA reauthorization [blueprint](#) called for a very heavy federal hand on the bottom 5 percent of schools. And it designated two other categories of schools (the next-to-the-lowest 5 percent and schools with the biggest achievement gaps) for special attention. States were given much more leeway over other schools, although there would still be some federal involvement.

But there has been talk in the Senate of keeping the federal focus on just the lowest performing 5 or 10 percent of schools and letting states largely decide what happens to other schools, advocates say.

It's tough to say just what an accountability system that just focuses on only the lowest performing schools would look like. Would states have control over what sorts of interventions schools that are missing achievement targets use? Would they control how schools are labeled? What else would be left up to states that is now under federal control?

So far, there hasn't been a hard and fast, comprehensive ESEA proposal released in the Senate, so it's tough to say for sure what ideas are out there and who stands where.

But my guess is that Republican leaders on the education committee—who have been seeking a significantly slimmed down federal role in education—are among those aiming to keep much of the federal focus on the lowest performing schools, while giving states much more control over other schools. For background, check out [this recent editorial](#), published in *The Hill* newspaper by Sen. Michael B. Enzi, the top Republican on the Senate education committee.

A number of Democratic senators see the logic in the five percent idea too, advocates say.

Some folks in the civil rights community are worried about a reauthorization that could ultimately focus solely on the bottom 5 or 10 percent of schools. That's not good policy from their perspective.

"There's no indication that there's going to be a [draft bill] that includes something other than the lowest 5 to 10 percent of schools, and that won't cut it," said Dianne Piche, the director of education programs for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. "We would be rolling back this law to the era of the Reagan administration, when you had block grants."

The Leadership Conference recently released its own [set of recommendations](#) for ESEA reauthorization. Generally, the group is adding its voice to the chorus of [civil rights organizations](#) and [business groups](#) calling on the feds to focus on schools that aren't doing well with special populations, such as English-language learners.

But they also want to see high schools with high dropout rates and their feeder schools be subject to federal accountability requirements and want to ensure that an ESEA reauthorization doesn't start the clock over on school improvement, among other recommendations.

Meanwhile, other folks argue that having the federal government play a major role in accountability for all schools hasn't worked well. They say local districts and states would come up with better solutions.

What do you think? Should the feds focus on all students, or is just focusing on the bottom 5 or 10 percent of schools the right way to go?

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## Gov. Christie on Unions, Presidential Politics, and NCLB

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

May 11, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/05/its\\_much\\_too\\_early\\_im.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/05/its_much_too_early_im.html)

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who some call a [disruptor](#), a [kingmaker](#), and a [public schools' destroyer](#), has unveiled an ambitious [set of education reform proposals](#) targeted mostly at teachers.

He wants to create a more effective teacher evaluation system tied, in part, to test scores, end lifetime tenure, and create differentiated pay. He also wants to expand charter schools and school choice in low-performing districts. But, he says, he definitely [does not want to run for president](#).

After going [toe-to-toe](#) with U.S. Rep. George Miller at an education town hall in Washington on Wednesday, he sat down with me for a 30-minute wide-ranging interview.

He wasn't shy about casting blame for educational woes squarely on the shoulders of the teachers' unions. Here are excerpts:

**Q.** Why haven't you tried to limit collective bargaining, as other Republican governors have done?

**A.** "I have no problem with collective bargaining as long as collective bargaining is fair and adversarial. A lot of times collective bargaining has been a kum-ba-ya session where nobody's representing the taxpayers."

**Q.** Are you worried if the anti-union rhetoric will rally the Democratic base in New Jersey and across the country?

**A.** "No. I want to get the job done. I'm not worried about the politics of this. I'm not going to take politics into account in making these decisions."

**Q.** Is there any part of the Obama administration's education agenda you disagree with?

**A.** "Maybe I'd want to be a little more aggressive. We're saying many of the same things. That would be a criticism pretty much on the margins." (He praised the president for "outstanding leadership.")

**Q.** How should Education Secretary Arne Duncan use the new [\\$700 million](#) in Race to the Top funds, especially since your state [narrowly lost](#) out last time?

**A.** The same way he did the first time, "to incentivize needed reform."

**Q.** If states are given more flexibility over accountability in a revision of No Child Left Behind, what would you do that you can't do now under the law?

**A.** "I don't think there's a lot that the federal government is doing at the moment that prevents me from doing that (his own accountability system). The forces that are preventing me from doing that are internal, not external. It's 9 percent of overall education spending in America. With the exception of Race to the Top, I don't think federal education funding has driven any type of change. And I don't think it will. Governors have to lead on this. And state legislatures have to lead on this."

**Q.** Why are you critical of spending more money on education, but you gladly accepted a [\\$100 million Facebook donation](#) for Newark's schools?

**A.** "It's a good thing, but it's a drop in the bucket. This past year, we spent \$880 million on Newark. I was happy about the Facebook money because it would be money without strings that we'd be able to spend on innovation that would not be the money governed by the strict constitutional formulas that New Jersey has to comply with because of our [out-of-control activist Supreme Court](#). But money does matter. My issue about money is I want results and accountability for what I'm spending."

**Q.** Are teachers the central piece of your agenda, or do you plan to unveil more education reforms?

**A.** "Yeah, because I think the teacher is the central actor in improving education—teachers and principals. This is the central thesis."

**Q.** (Christie says that only 23 percent of Newark's high schoolers will graduate in four years.) So does that mean the vast majority of the district's teachers are really bad?

**A.** "No."

**Q.** Is the issue more complex than just teachers?

**A.** "Of course it is. But they're all inter-related. The union tries to use some of the unrelated issues (socio-economic status, parental involvement) as excuses for why there can't be success. Well, OK, if you follow the teachers' union argument, you say you have to give up on this because they can't learn. I don't believe that. But I can only control the things I can control, which is to demand accountability from teachers ... and from principals ... from central office administrators." (He went on to talk about the arguments he's heard from teachers that evaluation systems can't be fairly designed, and that merit pay destroys collegiality.) "These arguments are so stupid I can't believe I have to make them and then respond to them."

**Q.** Are unions going to have to be a partner in education reform?

**A.** "Of course."

**Q.** But how will that happen when you've made clear you don't like them too much?

**A.** "They made clear they didn't like me before I made clear I didn't like them. Let's start with that. I think that question needs to be asked of them. Because I am the governor. And all of the people of the state elected me as opposed to who elected them. I've said all along that if they're willing to talk about legitimate real reforms ... make real proposals about reforming teacher evaluations, about reforming teacher pay, I'm willing to sit down and talk with them. But until that time comes, I'm not wasting my time and let them divert me from what I'm doing. I'm no dummy. I'm not going to sit around and have fruitless conversations with them where they run me around the block and they run out the clock on my ability to get reform done."

**Q.** How will you get your education proposals through a Democrat-controlled legislature?

**A.** "Gently."

**Q.** Which GOP presidential contender has the best education creds?

**A.** "It's much too early. I'm not going to dodge the question ultimately if I decide to support somebody. I'm not a wallflower."

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## Indiana Education Package Bears Conservative Stamp

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

May 12, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/05/12/31indiana.h30.html?tkn=NZYFL7EbbwvQ060Wn9wSoJAacNgMwlys%2FF3u&cmp=clp-edweek>

As states around the country near the end of contentious legislative sessions, few have made as many dramatic changes to education policy as Indiana, where Gov. Mitch Daniels and fellow Republicans have put a conservative stamp on issues ranging from school choice to teacher evaluations and collective bargaining.

Those victories come amid speculation about whether Mr. Daniels will pursue the 2012 GOP presidential nomination—a possibility that would almost certainly make his schools agenda the focus of intense national scrutiny, and partisan debate. Lawmakers in Indiana's Republican-controlled legislature, with Mr. Daniels' support, this year approved the creation of what might be the nation's most ambitious voucher program, as well as charter school expansion, pay-for-performance for educators, and restrictions on teachers' collective-bargaining powers.

Republicans have pursued similar agendas in numerous states on the heels of a GOP wave in last year's elections, which put the party in control of a majority of governor's office and its largest number of legislative seats since the late 1920s.

Yet Indiana's agenda is unusual for the broad sweep of its education proposals, some of which closely resemble other state models, while others—particularly the private-school choice plan—take school policy in a new direction.

"We believe we have done some things that will make a profound difference in the lives of children in our state," Gov. Daniels said at a May 4 [speech](#) at the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington think tank. Those states' new laws, he said, "will make a significant difference in the economic prospects of our state, if we can implement them well."

### *Sweeping Changes*

By the conclusion of Indiana's legislative session late last month, lawmakers had approved a host of far-reaching policy changes, some of the most significant of which will affect the teaching profession.

[One such measure](#), signed by Mr. Daniels on April 20, will limit teachers' collective bargaining rights to wage-and-benefits issues, removing numerous working conditions and procedures for dismissing teachers as subjects of negotiation between

districts and unions. District officials would, however, be expected to hold discussions with teachers on some policy decisions, such as curriculum and textbooks, teaching methods and class sizes.

New laws in Wisconsin and Ohio that restricted teachers' collective bargaining powers, and drew major protests from educators and other public workers, now face legal and political challenges. While Indiana's law drew less nationwide scrutiny, it was strongly opposed by teachers' unions and Democratic state lawmakers.

Teachers also were angered by the passage of another [Indiana law](#) that will require that teachers be evaluated annually and that their ability to produce gains in student achievement, as measured by test scores and other factors, be considered. It also ties salary increase to performance, rather than just factors such as seniority.

Other newly approved laws are meant to provide a wider range of educational options for students. One measure will make it easier to sponsor charter schools and convert traditional public schools into charters, while also setting new regulations and academic standards for them. Another law will allow students who graduate early from high school to receive \$4,000 in state aid to cover tuition at in-state public or private colleges

### *Expansive Voucher Program*

But the piece of Indiana's agenda that has drawn the most attention is the [voucher](#) measure, signed into law on May 5. Around the country, state programs to provide vouchers, or public dollars for private school tuition, have typically limited the pool of eligible applicants to students from low-income backgrounds, or to special populations, such as students with disabilities. But Indiana's law will allow families to receive vouchers if they earn incomes up to 150 percent of the federal qualifications for free or reduced-price lunches. Families of four with annual household incomes up to about \$62,000 would be eligible.

Students from poorer families would be eligible for larger amounts of aid—about 90 percent of per-student public funding—while students from families with greater annual incomes would receive 50 percent. For children in grades 1-8, the maximum voucher amount would top out at \$4,500 per year. For students in grades 9-12, the amount would vary by family income level.

The Indiana voucher law also sets unusually strong testing requirements for private schools that receive students through the voucher program.

Until now, all state-accredited private schools were given a choice of participating in either the Indiana statewide assessment, known as the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus, or in another norm-referenced test. Non-accredited private schools did not have to meet that requirement. Currently 227 of Indiana's state-accredited private schools take the ISTEP, said Alex Damron, a spokesman for the state department of education.

Under the new law, all private schools that accept students through the new voucher program—whether the schools are state-accredited or not—will have to participate in ISTEP. Additionally, participating private schools will be required to have all students take the ISTEP and report their scores at all the grade levels required of public schools—not just the grade levels at which they are accepting students on vouchers.

Additionally, all participating private schools in the voucher program also will have their academic performance graded on the state's A-F scale, which Indiana officials are in the process of rolling out for all of the state's public schools.

### *Tough Testing Mandate*

While many states set testing requirements for private-school voucher programs, few, if any, have as strong a mandate as Indiana's new law, according to the [Foundation for Educational Choice](#), in Indianapolis, which tracks such efforts.

Robert C. Enlow, the chief executive officer of the foundation, which supported the voucher measure, said that while he has heard some objections to the testing requirements, he also believes those standards will build confidence in the program. Creating a "functioning market" for school choice requires that parents be given "quality, transparent" data, he argued.

"You will have customers who will be able to choose among options and who will be presented with the information to choose," Mr. Enlow said.

Glenn Tebbe, the executive director of the [Indiana Catholic Conference](#), the public policy voice of the church in Indiana, said that while there were concerns among Catholic school officials about being told "how to operate," most did not regard the state's testing requirements as onerous.

"We're willing to provide evidence, in a reasonable way, of the contributions we make to society," Mr. Tebbe said.

Many Catholic schools across the country have struggled financially with declining enrollment, and Indiana Catholic schools face the same challenges, Mr. Tebbe said. He estimates that there are about 200 Catholic schools in the state today, the majority of which are located in the state's most-populated cities and towns. Many middle- and lower-middle-class families face some of the same barriers that poor families do in covering Catholic school tuition, he said. The law will help both the institutions and the families.

"We're struggling to make it affordable to families," Mr. Tebbe said, as "parents are trying to meet their obligations. We're trying to find a midpoint."

Others question the logic behind the voucher program, particularly as public schools have been asked to make sacrifices in their budgets. Indiana, which has a total two-year budget of \$28 billion, kept K-12 funding level, at about \$6.5 billion, in calendar year 2011, according to the state budget office, though the state officials recently agreed to pump \$150 more into schools over the next spending cycle. But school funding was cut by nearly \$300 million the previous year, reductions that resulted in layoff and other reductions, said Nate Schnellenberger, the president of the Indiana State Teachers Association, a 45,000-member union that opposed the voucher measure.

The voucher law will take money from the public system "and give it to private schools," Mr. Schnellenberger said.

Voucher laws have faced legal challenges in numerous states, often on the grounds that they violate provisions in state constitutions that prevent public money from supporting religious schools or institutions. Mr. Schnellenberger said the ISTA is evaluating the legality of the Indiana law and whether to support efforts to challenge it.

### *Political Reaction*

But many of the questions about the sweeping package of Indiana laws focus on their political, rather than their legal,

implications.

Mr. Daniels, 62, has said he is considering entering the 2012 presidential race to challenge President Barack Obama, though he had not announced a decision as of this week. A former director of the [Office of Management and Budget](#) under President George W. Bush, he has touted his record as a fiscal conservative since winning election as Indiana's governor in 2004. He has also argued that major changes in education are necessary to create a more qualified workforce in his state and around the country.

A number of observers outside Indiana expect that debates over the nation's fragile economic recovery—not education—will dominate the next presidential campaign. But they also say that Mr. Daniels' and other Republican leaders' support for new voucher programs represents one of the sharpest policy divides between the GOP and the president—one that will probably receive considerable attention, no matter who challenges Mr. Obama.

The president has supported charter schools, merit pay, improved student data systems, and other education policies that have won him praise from many Republicans, including Mr. Daniels. But Mr. Obama has opposed school vouchers, a longtime centerpiece of GOP school-policy platforms. And he and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have spoken out against efforts to strip public workers' collective bargaining rights, calling for negotiation between labor and management.

Phil Handy, a former top education adviser to Republican Sen. John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign, said the idea of expanding private-school choice will appeal to many voters, particularly independents. Mr. Handy, who also served on Florida's state board of education, is advising former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, who has said he is running for president in 2012. "Rich people have the choice" whether to send their children to public or private schools, Mr. Handy said. "Why shouldn't people of all means have that choice?" The message to voters, he said, will be that "we're talking about educating kids—not protecting the system."

But Mr. Schnellenberger, of the [Indiana State Teachers Association](#), said he does not believe the public is sympathetic to the idea of public dollars covering middle-income families' costs for private education.

"My wife and I could afford to send our kids to private schools, if we so chose," he said. "But I [wouldn't] expect the state of Indiana to subsidize that decision."

Teachers' unions have traditionally been major Democratic Party supporters during federal and state elections. To the extent that the Obama administration has rankled teachers through its positions on merit pay, charter, and other issues, Republican policies on vouchers—whether the nominee is Mr. Daniels or someone else—could galvanize support behind Mr. Obama, said Paul Manna, an associate professor of government and public policy at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Va. Economic and educational issues are likely to intersect in several ways during the 2012 race, Mr. Manna predicted. Candidates in both parties are almost certain to argue that improving schools is crucial to the nation's continued job growth and prosperity, he said, though they're likely to differ on the amount of public resources that should be devoted to education.

The ongoing financial pressures on states and school districts could accentuate the debate over vouchers, he added.

Democrats are likely to respond to efforts to channel public money to private schools by arguing, "We can't afford it," Mr. Manna said. Republicans, he said, could make the opposite case: "The middle class has had it tough during these times," and when it comes to private school choice, "why can't they benefit?"

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **Opinion: Historic charter school legislation passed at session**

Sun Sentinel

By: Jon Hage

May 11, 2011

[http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-05-11/news/fl-charter-school-forum-20110511\\_1\\_charter-schools-usa-public-schools-capital-dollars](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-05-11/news/fl-charter-school-forum-20110511_1_charter-schools-usa-public-schools-capital-dollars)

How appropriate, though unplanned, it is that the Florida Legislature ended by passing historic charter school legislation, the same week our nation celebrated National Charter School Week.

Former Gov. Jeb Bush often remarks, "It's not about the adults, it's about the students." These words echo strongly again in Florida as Senate President Mike Haridopolos, House Speaker Dean Cannon and Gov. Rick Scott championed expanding corporate tax scholarships, virtual schools and charter schools. With some 150,000 students and waiting lists nearing 50,000, charter school growth of 15 percent per year cannot keep up with demand.

Far too often, school districts have seen themselves as competitors, rather than collaborators with charters, by opposing charter growth and expansion, even for the highest-performing charters. To help these students and parents, Florida has broken new ground in the charter school world by creating the designation of High Performing Charter Schools and by providing incentives to replicate those proven schools to serve more students.

Of course, all charters are not high-performing, and chronically low performers should be shut down. But if we are to close the achievement gap in America, we need to replicate and scale the successful models and give them incentives to go into low-performing areas. A high-performing charter school helps surrounding schools become better and pressures bad schools to improve or lose students and the funding that goes with them. Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools must perform every year or risk being shut down.

Unfortunately, charters still must fight the inequity in per-pupil funding. In fact, charters do not receive local funds for school construction and some federal funds directly, even though they are public schools supported by the same taxpaying parents.

While charters can and do provide more for less dollars, it is unfair to make deeper cuts in charter budgets than to school district budgets. Florida's governor and Legislature worked hard to avoid unfair cuts to charters by restoring their capital dollars, though much work in the future is needed to address this problem.

Florida is now reclaiming our rightful role of reform leader. We must never lose heart in our pursuit of excellence and be willing to see through these ideas, even while ensuring we appropriately fund what works, whether traditional public schools or school choice laboratories of innovation. The recent nationally acclaimed documentary, "Waiting for Superman," appropriately asked: Where is Superman, and who's going to save us? The answer, at least in Florida and in a growing number of other states, is the parents and our representatives who listen to them!

*Jon Hage is the president and CEO of Charter Schools USA, one of the nation's largest operators of charter schools based in Fort Lauderdale.*

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## **FCAT 2.0, graded on more of a curve, worries Jacksonville officials**

Florida Times-Union

By: Mary Kelli Palka

May 12, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2011-05-12/story/fcat-20-graded-more-curve-worries-jacksonville-officials#ixzz1M8VmS6sz>

*Conversion to a new system has students graded on a curve.*

Scores on this year's Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test won't be based solely on the students' performances on the exam but on how they do compared to the other students in the state.

It's not yet clear what that will mean for Duval County schools, especially the county's four struggling intervene schools, but local officials fear it could hurt. If Raines, Ribault and Jackson high schools and North Shore K-8 don't show gains on the FCAT this year, they may be turned over to a management group.

"That is absurd," said School Board member Betty Burney about this year's scoring protocol. "For some of the kids, it won't matter if they've studied their hearts out, because the state is just going to be concerned with a percentage."

Usually the state reports student scores based on individual achievement levels and then compares the current year scores to previous years to determine performance gains. But this year's tests, called FCAT 2.0, are more rigorous than previous tests because they were written to match updated standards. The state won't set achievement levels for FCAT 2.0 until next fall.

So to show student performance gains, the state will report FCAT 2.0 on the existing FCAT scale by linking the percentiles of the two tests. For instance, if 9 percent of sixth-grade students statewide scored an achievement level of 5 last year on the math FCAT, this year only the top 9 percent of students will be able to score a 5.

Statewide, the percentage of students scoring at each achievement level won't change from 2010. But the percentage would likely vary at the district and school levels.

The process the state is using is similar to the one used to identify what scores students must score on the SAT or ACT to graduate if they didn't pass the 10th-grade FCAT.

The state engaged district superintendents to help determine how to link FCAT and FCAT 2.0.

Duval Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals said the state's method is probably the best way, given the amount of data available at the time.

He said he doesn't know what this will mean for Duval schools, but believes students have been prepared for the more rigorous standards.

But if the city's intervene schools don't perform well on this year's FCAT, the state may make the district turn the schools over to an outside organization.

Pratt-Dannals repeated what he has been saying for more than a year: Schools should be judged on the new high school grading system, for which FCAT accounts for only half of a school's score. The other half of the grade is based on things such as accelerated class participation and performance and graduation rates.

Burney said she wasn't aware of this year's change. She said the state should hold schools harmless on its accountability measures during this conversion year for the FCAT.

"Those schools that did not perform well are going to continue to not perform well if that's the only thing we're looking at," Burney said.

She said parents should complain to state leaders about the fairness of determining gains this year and the high-stakes nature of FCAT.

Also, this is the first year the state began giving end-of-course exams to algebra students. Additional subjects will be added in

future years. But for this year, the baseline scores for algebra will be based on a bell curve, which provides a student's score in relationship to the mean. Achievement levels for the algebra test will be determined next year.

*Times-Union writer Topher Sanders contributed to this report.*

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Corbett touts school vouchers**

Pittsburg Post-Gazette

By: Daniel Malloy

May 10, 2011

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11130/1145408-298-0.stm>

*Talk in D.C. draws protests by unions*

WASHINGTON -- Teachers unions are undermining public education, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett told a sympathetic audience of school voucher supporters here Monday.

As mostly union protesters chanted outside the Washington Marriott denouncing Pennsylvania's pending bill that would create a statewide school voucher program for low-income students, Mr. Corbett touted the proposal as a way to improve failing schools by making them compete for students.

Teachers unions, Mr. Corbett said, are among the main reasons public education has declined in quality. He said the rise in unions turned education into a "labor-management model."

"School districts began to focus too much on contracts and too little on curriculum," he said. "It's not a system that makes schools work for children."

Opening the National Policy Summit of the American Federation for Children and the Alliance for School Choice, Mr. Corbett told of his own experience as a high school history and civics teacher and said he wants to be clear that his plan is not an attack on teachers.

But it is aimed at teachers unions, which Mr. Corbett said needlessly protect teachers who just hang on for a couple of years until they get tenure. Union last-in, first-out policies might be useful in industries where workers do similar rote jobs, but in teaching, Mr. Corbett said, it doesn't properly reward talent -- or punish incompetence.

"We need an educational workforce of strivers, not survivors," he said.

The pending voucher bill would give low-income parents vouchers equal to the amount of state per-student spending for use at private or parochial schools if they choose to remove their students from public schools. Foes say it will drain still more funding from already squeezed public schools.

Outside the hotel, several dozen union-backed protesters marched and chanted: "Say no to vouchers; save our students." Organizers said about 50 of the protesters came from Pennsylvania. Others came from Wisconsin and the D.C. area to oppose the appearances of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and former D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee -- both of whom have staged high-profile battles with unions.

About 10 counter-protesters from the conservative organization FreedomWorks held up signs supporting the Pennsylvania bill.

As American Federation for Children chairwoman Betsy DeVos was introducing Mr. Corbett, a protester briefly interrupted her with shouts before being escorted from the luncheon.

Mr. Corbett said he understood that the proposals were "threatening" to some people, but the vocal foes of school choice simply need to learn more about it.

"I think we're talking to the choir," Mr. Corbett said at the start of his speech. "I wish we could have the woman who was just in here to sit down and talk."

The bill, known as Senate Bill 1, is pending in the state Senate, where Republicans and some Democrats favor vouchers. But there's not as much support for them in the GOP-controlled House, where members prefer offering tax credits of as much as 95 percent to businesses that provide scholarships to children whose families earn less than \$75,000 a year.

That concept also is included in Senate Bill 1, but in the House there is momentum to expand the program by offering more tax credits. House Republicans see the tax credits program as an alternative to vouchers.

Caucus spokesman Stephen Miskin called the program a successful public-private partnership.

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# Wis. Assembly passes voucher expansion

Associated Press

By: Scott Bauer

May 10, 2011

<http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Wis-Assembly-passes-voucher-expansion-1373096.php>

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — The Republican effort to expand voucher schools in Wisconsin moved a step forward Tuesday with the Assembly's passage of a bill that would allow public school students to attend private and religious schools outside of the city of Milwaukee at taxpayers' expense.

The bill approved 57-36 along a party line vote by the Republican-controlled Assembly would expand vouchers to all of Milwaukee County.

But Gov. [Scott Walker](#) and fellow Republicans in the Legislature want to go even further. Walker told a school choice group Monday night that before his budget passes in June it will allow for vouchers in cities across the state, including Green Bay, Beloit and Racine. It's a move expected to be added to his budget proposal before it's brought up for debate next month.

Supporters say the 20-year-old voucher program is about giving families more choices in where to send their children to be educated, but Democrats deride it as the privatization of public education.

"There are students in Milwaukee that are in a failing system," said Republican Assembly Speaker [Jeff Fitzgerald](#). "Why would you not want to help these children? This boogeyman that all public education is going to go by the wayside, that's not true. It's called competition."

Republicans voted down several Democratic amendments that would have kept the enrollment cap in place and blocked the expansion of the program. Democrats argued there is little accountability in the program, either with the money spent or the performance of students.

The debate comes as Republicans across the country are pushing to expand voucher programs after the GOP made big gains in the 2010 elections. Groups that support school choice issues, such as vouchers, were big financial supporters of Republicans across the country and in Wisconsin.

Only students from low-income families in Milwaukee can participate in Wisconsin's voucher program currently. The bill passed by the Assembly would eliminate the 22,500-student enrollment cap at the same time it expands the program to all of Milwaukee County starting next school year.

Democratic opponents argued Tuesday that the proposal was part of a concerted effort by Republicans both in Wisconsin and nationally to privatize public schools.

"You're decimating public education," said Rep. [Christine Sinicki](#), D-Milwaukee. "You're going to decimate the city of Milwaukee."

Democratic Rep. [Jason Fields](#), who is black, berated Republican supporters of the bill and members of his own party during the debate, saying none of them understood how difficult it was for minority students in Milwaukee schools.

"You all are full of s---," he said, throwing down his microphone and causing the Assembly to stop action for several minutes.

Walker, a strong advocate for voucher programs and charter schools, also wants to phase out the requirement that only students from poor families be eligible for the voucher program. Currently to qualify, a family must earn less than 175 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$39,630 for a family of four.

State Superintendent [Tony Evers](#) has questioned expanding the voucher program at the same time Walker is proposing cutting public school aid by more than \$800 million over the next two years.

If 1,000 more students use vouchers to leave [Milwaukee Public Schools](#), the district will lose 38 percent of its aid, or about \$2.4 million, according to the state [Department of Public Instruction](#). The district would be allowed to make up that difference through raising property taxes.

Private and religious schools that accept voucher students receive \$6,442 from the state for each pupil. About 21,000 students are enrolled in the program, which is below the current cap that the bill would eliminate. The program has cost about \$130 million in taxpayer money this year.

Walker is also proposing eliminating a requirement that voucher students take the same statewide achievement tests that public school students must take.

This year, results were released for the first time comparing public school and voucher students. They showed voucher students lagging behind their peers in public schools. Supporters of the voucher program say the test results don't tell the full story and that other studies have shown the students have higher graduation rates than their public school counterparts.

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# Performance-based teacher layoff bill dies in committee

Los Angeles Times

By: Jason Song

May 12, 2011

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-0512-tenure-20110512.0.4545904.story>

*California legislation calling for the creation of teacher ratings for use in layoff decisions instead of seniority fails to win enough votes to move forward.*

Legislation that would have allowed school districts to lay off teachers based on performance, not seniority, failed in a state Senate education committee Wednesday.

The measure, proposed by state Sen. Bob Huff (R-Diamond Bar), called for school districts to create new administrator and teacher evaluations that would be partially based on student test score data. It would have allowed district officials to lay off teachers based on performance.

Currently, by state law, teachers are laid off strictly by seniority during budget shortfalls.

Three Republican senators supported the bill in a committee hearing, falling short of the six votes needed to proceed to the full Senate.

This is the second straight year that the bill has failed, and earlier attempts to do away with seniority-based layoffs also proved unsuccessful.

During the hearing, Huff said his bill would give districts more flexibility and children more access to high-quality teachers.

"We should not have a quality-blind approach to our teachers," he said. "We should have an approach that understands there are differences."

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa sent a letter to the committee expressing support for the bill, although he said that changes to the state education code were also necessary to overhaul seniority-based layoffs. Several school districts, including Los Angeles Unified, were also in favor of the bill.

But several dozen teachers testified against the legislation, saying that student test scores should not be included in evaluations and that the bill would give too much weight to evaluations.

Huff said the testimony was a sign of teacher unions' power and helped quash the bill. "What happened today was [the union] flexed their muscle," he said.

California Teachers Assn. representatives did not return an email, but A.J. Duffy, president of the Los Angeles teachers union, said he was pleased that the bill did not pass.

"There must be something better," he said.

Huff said he was disappointed that the bill did not garner enough votes to proceed. "The defeat ... means incompetent teachers are still given preference to better teachers because of the quality-blind approach we currently use," he said in a statement.

Los Angeles Unified School District Supt. John Deasy, who is pushing to revamp evaluations in the state's largest school system, also expressed disappointment but vowed to keep pressing for change.

"I'm going to continue to work with our legislators that seek to reform the evaluation system," he said.

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