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To: [Undisclosed recipients:](#)

CC:

Date: Mon, 1/30/2012 11:14:09 AM

Subject: Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 1/30/11

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NATIONAL NEWS

Obama Rolls Out New Higher Education Initiatives

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein [Like](#) Liked

January 27, 2012

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/01/19obama.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/01/19obama.h31.html?tkn=STTFUM7xW%2F3P6N6R2sYrsjKANBMOFUUABhRP&cmp=clp-edweek)

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In his State of the Union address and a follow-up speech outlining a major new higher education initiative, President Barack Obama took aim at an issue that resonates with a constituency likely to be important to his re-election campaign: college students struggling to pay off their student loans.

A [marquee piece](#) would be a new, \$1 billion version of his signature Race to the Top competition aimed at encouraging states to improve their higher education systems—while requiring that they maintain adequate levels of funding for higher education if they hope to win one of the grants.

The administration also is seeking to create a \$55 million grant contest, dubbed the "First in the World" competition, to help institutions scale up promising strategies in areas such as technology and early-college preparation.

And Mr. Obama last week put universities on notice that they may be in danger of losing key federal student financial aid if they don't keep tuition in check and are unable to graduate higher numbers of students, including those eligible for Pell Grants, which help low-income students pay for college.

Specifically, the administration wants to reconfigure the formula for distributing campus-based aid, such as that in the [Perkins Loan Program](#), to favor institutions that hold tuition down while graduating higher numbers of low-income students.

Both proposals would require congressional approval.

But the president's State of the Union speech last week largely skirted elements of his K-12 agenda that have met with disdain from congressional Republicans—or that could alienate teachers, who traditionally play a large role in Democrats' get-out-the-vote efforts.

For instance, while President Obama said schools should have flexibility to "stop teaching to the test," he steered clear of discussing his support for teacher pay-for-performance programs and mandatory teacher evaluations that rely, at least in part, on student test scores.

And he passed up the opportunity to mention two of his administration's premier K-12 initiatives: the Race to the Top education redesign competition, and a plan to offer states wiggle room under key pieces of the No Child Left Behind Act in exchange for embracing certain education overhaul priorities.

Both of those proposals have been at the center of partisan discord, with Republicans threatening to jettison the Race to the Top from the federal budget and questioning the administration's authority to issue nclb waivers. Instead, Mr. Obama focused on initiatives that will seem to be an easy sell with college students.

"This is likely to be a very popular set of proposals," Patrick McGuinn, an associate professor of political science and education at Drew University, in Madison, N.J., said in an interview after the State of the Union address, before details of the higher education proposal were released.

In particular, he said, the college-affordability issue should resonate with young voters, who were a key part of Mr. Obama's

victory in 2008. "He's going to need them again," Mr. McGuinn said.

In an address that emphasized four pillars—manufacturing, energy, worker training, and American values—President Obama advocated a handful of concrete K-12 policies to the assembled members of Congress.

For instance, he urged states to raise the age for compulsory school attendance to 18. "We ... know that when students aren't allowed to walk away from their education, more of them walk the stage to get their diploma," he said.

In recent years, some states have moved to raise the dropout age, not always with success. For instance, in Kentucky, Gov. Steve Beshear, a Democrat, has fought unsuccessfully to raise the compulsory-attendance age to 18, from 16, during the past two legislative sessions.

The federal government doesn't have control of policy on how long students must attend school, an issue that historically has been within states' purview.

Also in the precollegiate arena, Mr. Obama wants to develop a competitive program that would challenge states and districts to work with their teachers and unions to comprehensively improve the teaching profession. That would appear to be a twist on the existing [Teacher Incentive Fund](#), which the Obama administration has proposed expanding to include principals.

But higher education took a more prominent place in the speech. The president reiterated his call for Congress to approve some version of the DREAM Act, which would offer young immigrants who came illegally to the United States as children a path to citizenship through going to college or serving in the military.

And he called directly on colleges and universities to hold down costs in order to make higher education more accessible, warning that they risk a loss of federal money if they are unable to hold the line on tuition. "Let me put colleges and universities on notice: If you can't stop tuition from going up, the funding you get from taxpayers will go down," he said.

President Obama's plan, fleshed out in a speech delivered at the University of Michigan late last week, would create a new program that appears to build on an incentive in the original Race to Top, at the K-12 level, which rewarded states that signed on to the [Common Core State Standards Initiative](#), an effort by states to create more uniform, rigorous standards that prepare students for postsecondary education.

In addition to maintaining "adequate" funding for higher education, states hoping to win a grant would have to smooth the transition between K-12 and higher education by aligning entrance and exit standards between the two systems.

New Competition

Mr. Obama also proposed a \$55 million competition that would offer grants to colleges and universities to scale up promising practices in areas including technology and college preparation. At first blush, that program appears modeled on the Investing in Innovation grant program, which offered similar rewards to schools and nonprofits.

Another new proposal would revise the Perkins Loan Program and other campus-based aid programs. Right now, that aid is distributed under a formula that rewards schools in part for the number of years they have participated in the system. Under the change, colleges that kept tuition under control and graduated a relatively large share of Pell Grant-eligible students would be rewarded with a larger share of the grants.

The administration is also planning to create a "college scorecard" to make it easier for students and parents to choose a college that they can afford and that will help advance the students' career goals. The so-called "shopping sheet" would include postgraduation earnings and employment information for a college's students, according to published reports.

Other higher education proposals unveiled last week included doubling the number of work-study jobs, which allow students to work part time on campus to defray their college costs; making permanent the American Opportunity Tax Credit, which provides up to \$10,000 in tax breaks for tuition over four years of college; and keeping the interest rate on subsidized [Stafford Loans](#) from doubling on July 1 of this year as it is set to do under current law.

Mr. Obama also called on businesses to partner with community colleges to help spur job creation.

David Baime, the senior vice president for government relations and research at the American Association of Community Colleges, said he was encouraged that the president emphasized the need for states to do more to support higher education. "Our colleges have done a great deal to curb their costs," he said. "But the reality is that tuition will continue to increase if states continue to cut their support."

Assistant Editor Michele McNeil and Contributing Writer Caralee Adams contributed to this article.

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Mergers Seen on the Rise in the K-12 Marketplace

Education Week

By: Jason Tomassini

January 27, 2012

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/27/19mergers.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/27/19mergers.h31.html?k=TRUFjhEO7GGjTHBQlupsGeUqiwHmDggfkX4z&cmp=clp-edweek)

[k=TRUFjhEO7GGjTHBQlupsGeUqiwHmDggfkX4z&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/27/19mergers.h31.html?k=TRUFjhEO7GGjTHBQlupsGeUqiwHmDggfkX4z&cmp=clp-edweek)

The education industry accounted for an estimated \$10 billion in mergers and acquisitions last year, with K-12 technology responsible for the second-largest annual increase in transactions of any education sector, a report from an investment banking firm says.

The flurry of transactions last year—which included major purchases by the education publisher Pearson and the online-course provider K12 Inc. and the acquisition of Blackboard Inc., a learning-management-system company—matched 2010 activity, but doubled the amount of dollars spent in acquisitions in 2009, according to the [report](#) released by New York City-based Berkery Noyes.

Transactions related to K-12 technology continued a steady incline from 16 in 2010 to 24 last year. And the deals were bigger—the nine largest education transactions in 2011 accounted for an estimated \$5.66 billion in value, an increase of more

than \$2 billion over transactions in 2010.

"The level of activity is higher than it ever has been before," said Mary Jo Zandy, the managing director of Berkery Noyes, which both tracks and advises companies in merger and acquisition deals.

Industry experts say the data reinforce broader trends in K-12 education: Technology is moving quickly into classrooms, companies can enter the market more cheaply, and districts want integrated, comprehensive technology systems, often achievable through acquisition.

Many of 2011's highest-profile transactions in K-12 involved content companies and technology companies. The content companies gained a more diverse suite of products and services to offer districts; the technology companies became better equipped to meet rapidly changing curriculum standards.

"IT directors and tech coordinators are looking for a single point of contact, a well-supported company that can respond to inquiries" and offer features such as student assessment data, grading systems, and digital curricula, all in one, said Mike Lawrence, the executive director of Computer-Using Educators, a Walnut Creek, Calif.-based ed-tech advocacy group.

For \$230 million, Pearson, the education publisher based domestically in New York City, purchased SchoolNet, a software company that uses student data to create personalized instruction.

And for the second straight year, Pearson led all companies with eight education acquisitions in 2011, including a German provider of test-prep materials, an online-schools operator, and two online tutoring services, the report says. In Pearson's January [trading update](#), the company reported \$3 billion in revenue from its digital products for 2011.

K-12 Inc. purchased Kaplan Virtual Education, a former division of Kaplan Inc. that runs virtual education programs for public and private schools. Just months before, Kaplan Virtual Education had acquired its own rival, Insight Schools Inc., a Portland, Ore.-based provider of online courses.

The largest single K-12-related transaction last year was the purchase by Providence Equity Partners, a Providence, R.I.-based private equity firm, of Washington-based Blackboard Inc. for \$1.64 billion, plus an additional \$130 million in debt. Blackboard itself had been one of the more active acquirers in 2010. Blackboard was a publicly traded company before the 2011 sale, but is now privately held.

Limiting Options?

The increased activity in K-12, as compared with the relatively modest increase in higher education, owes to two factors, said Karen Billings, the vice president of the Washington-based Software and Information Industry Association's education division. First, the K-12 community is slowly but surely warming up to technology in the classroom, especially as digital applications aimed at young children proliferate, she said. And second, the embrace of technology in postsecondary education is spilling over into K-12 as more school districts offer more college-level curricula.

Not coincidentally, the two areas ripe for the most activity in 2012 are prekindergarten and high school, Ms. Billings said.

Widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards should spark even more activity, as companies large and small scramble to offer related products, Ms. Zandy of Berkery Noyes said.

"Not everyone can throw out what they have and compete in school districts where they competed before," she said, suggesting mergers will help some companies adapt.

Of course, the activity isn't necessarily positive for students.

On the district level, "there's definitely a concern that as [big education companies] acquire their competition, it limits choice and it limits the resources available to the school system," Mr. Lawrence said. And, as Ms. Billings put it, districts could decide "a \$500 tablet is cheaper than a teacher."

Already this year, Apple partnered with the three largest textbook producers—Pearson, McGraw-Hill, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt—to offer e-textbooks exclusive to the iPad, a platform the education industry could now coalesce around, Ms. Zandy said. ("[Apple Unveils E-Textbook Strategy for K-12.](#)" Jan. 25, 2012.)

She expects 2012 to exceed last year's activity level.

"Higher ed. has already been consolidated, and in K-12 there's a lot more consolidation to go," she said.

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STATE NEWS

Q&A: Louisiana Superintendent of Education John White, point person for K-12 changes in Louisiana schools

Town Talk

By: Gannett Louisiana

January 29, 2011

<http://www.thetowntalk.com/article/20120129/NEWS01/120129001/Q-John-White-point-person-K-12-changes-Louisiana-schools>

Louisiana's new superintendent of education, John White, answers questions about his new post and Gov. Bobby Jindal's proposals to change K-12 public education.

--What brought you to Louisiana?

White: I came to Louisiana for really two reasons. (Joel Klein, chancellor of New York Public Schools) and I had become really close with Paul Pastorek and had grown to admire Paul's and the state's approach to education in Louisiana, particularly in New Orleans, and as we did that, Paul showed us the other things he was doing in Louisiana. I began to understand the longer

legacy of education changes in Louisiana under Governor Foster and others and really came to see where the dialogue on education in Louisiana was a more frank and, I thought, children-oriented one than certainly the dialogue in New York had become, and I think still is.

--What are your thoughts on the governor's education reform package?

White: I am very excited about his agenda because I think it really does address the most immediate and necessary changes across the school system of Louisiana. When you are in the parish systems, they tend to acknowledge these are, whether you like them or not, lasting and important reforms that work, especially toward families who have been too long underserved by our system.

--What are the major components of the governor's plan?

White: It has aligning early childhood education under a quality-oriented set of standards, and it's a very critical move. For too long we've allowed the funding streams to determine which early childhood programs get with accountability systems, and that's inequitable and wrong.

The teacher agenda — I think is just a set of logical proposals. When I'm in parish systems, I see that we have an evaluation system that is unable to do much of substance other than say you're effective or you're not. We're not, as a state, doing a lot in the way of compensating teachers in a way that ensures that we retain quality teachers, and we are not really doing a lot to speed the development and removal of very, very low performing teachers. And we're not doing a lot to increase the salaries of new teachers so that we can keep them and compete parish to parish or state to state. All of these things are about giving parishes the incentives and the mandates to change the way they operate in ways of managing their work force as it regards tenure, compensation, the way layoffs are done. All of these things are things that no matter whether we have an evaluation system, if we don't change the regulatory frameworks and the statutes in this state, districts are not going to change the way they do things.

---What about the scholarship portion of the plan? How do we accommodate the number of students eligible for transfers?

White: The governor's plan doesn't call for every student to take a voucher; it just says a certain number of kids are eligible for vouchers. I wouldn't anticipate that the scholarship program is taken up by nearly the number of kids eligible for it.

---How do you define an effective teacher?

White: There are universals of an effective teacher. An effective teacher always sets ambitious goals. On a minute-to-minute, day-to-day, week-to-week and unit-to-unit basis and then an annual basis and invests kids in those goals. A student should always be able to tell you what they are working toward. Provided a student can say that, then the teacher can build strong relationships with the child and his parents. And then the teacher has to be able to assess the progress toward the goal pretty deftly and adapt instructional strategy to the needs of the child. If you can do that you're going to be OK. The problem is that requires very different skill sets — a relationship skill set, a communication skill set, and a critical thinking skill set, all in the same person. I think that in the end that's why teaching is so unbelievably difficult because beyond the enormity of the task, (it's) the complexity of the task. This is a massively challenging profession, and we need to be rewarding it to every degree possible.

---What are your thoughts on the implementation of the common core curriculum?

White: I do have some concerns that the state is moving toward really, really increased standards that put us on the national playing field and tie us to a global bar, called the common core standards, which are being implemented across the nation. I don't think our teachers really appreciate or are even close to fully appreciating the enormity of the shift toward these new standards. If we're smart, we'll use this to start a discussion about the quality of student work being produced.

---How do we help recruit and maintain our teachers, especially in our rural districts?

White: I think with our Race to the Top money we can do more to create incentives for parishes to recruit science, engineering and math teachers. In the end, I think that if parishes can't create a supportive environment and tweak their own financial systems in ways that allow for more compensation on the front end, we're not going to be able to retain our teachers. The reality is our school systems are pouring literally millions of dollars into salary increases at the top end or in the middle for reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with things that have any bearing on student achievement whatsoever, including a master's degree or professional development credits or a doctorate degree — all of which are nice to have, but none of which have been shown to have an impact on student achievement as opposed to experience, your effectiveness and your rating in the classroom, which obviously has a bearing on student achievement.

---What do you think about the potential battle you may face in implementing these ideas?

White: I don't think that everything that is being talked about is nearly as draconian as people think that it is. Let's see what the governor's package says around compensation. It says that if you're ineffective, which is the bottom 10 percent of teachers every

year, you don't get a raise. That doesn't seem to me to be crazy that the \$1,500 increase that all teachers get every year, the bottom 10 percent are not going to get. All we're saying is there are three things that have been proven to matter, content knowledge in your area, experience and how good you are. Those are the three things that matter. We're not telling districts that we are going to set up your salary schedule for you, but (we're saying) please when you have a salary schedule, put it around that. Because the current system basically shifts thousands of dollars into these credits that are not shown to have a relationship to student achievement. I don't know what in there will negatively impact teacher's lives. The vast majority of teachers will be rated effective because the vast majority of teachers are effective.

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Opinion: How to grade a teacher

Los Angeles Times

By: James Encinas, Kyle Hunsberger and Michael Stryer

January 29, 2012

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-0129-stryker-evaluations-20120129.0,2386754.print.story>

United Teachers Los Angeles and the school district should get behind a teacher-led evaluation system.

We're teachers who believe that teacher evaluation, including the use of reliable test data, can be good for students and for teachers. Yes, yes, we know we're not supposed to exist. But we do, and there are a lot more of us.

In February the membership of United Teachers Los Angeles will vote on a teacher-led initiative urging union leaders to negotiate a new teacher evaluation system for L.A. Unified. The vote will allow teachers' voices to be heard above the din of warring political figures.

Although LAUSD and UTLA reached a contract agreement in December that embraced important school reforms, they haven't yet addressed teacher evaluation. Good teaching is enormously complex, and no evaluation system will capture it perfectly. But a substantive teacher-led evaluation system will be far better for students and teachers than what we have now, a system in which virtually all teachers receive merely "satisfactory" ratings from administrators.

The accountability movement in education — which was inaugurated by teachers unions, a fact nearly always overlooked by critics — has led to greater understanding of the power of teaching to change students' lives and the power of teachers to become more effective in response to feedback from peers and administrators. An evaluation system for L.A. Unified must take advantage of all that has been learned; it should use multiple measures, including classroom observations by competent, trained administrators; classroom visits by content-area experts; carefully designed student input; and test data.

The use of test data is the most contentious aspect of teacher evaluation. UTLA leadership has opposed any use of test data in evaluations, while the district and many parent and community groups strongly support its use as a major component in evaluation.

This stand-off is not good for teachers or students. We believe that educators can ensure that test data are used fairly and meaningfully by taking an active role in developing and monitoring the conditions attached to its use.

Although the initiative that all union-member teachers will be voting on in February simply urges UTLA to take an active role in the creation of teacher evaluations, we want to propose that a new evaluation system take into account the following elements:

Reliability of data: For the purposes of an evaluation, there should be at least three years of test data with adequate sample sizes and individual student data from previous years. Tests used for teacher evaluation should be subject to stringent integrity procedures. Until test reliability is greatly improved, test data should count for a minimal percentage of teacher evaluations. Moreover, under no conditions should test data count for more than 20% of a teacher's evaluation.

Methodology: Teachers should be assessed based on an analysis that relies on student progress, not absolute scores.

Student accountability: Although teachers obviously have enormous influence on student learning, teachers cannot succeed without students being held accountable. Students must meet minimum attendance requirements in order for their individual test scores to be counted. Additionally, students must have something at stake in taking tests used for teacher evaluation.

Support: The evaluation results must be tied to meaningful professional development. Test data should only be used in evaluations provided that the district and administrators at each school adequately support teachers' professional growth in those areas identified as "needing improvement." Test data should not be used in formal evaluations during a teacher's probationary period, the first two years he or she teaches.

Confidentiality: Test data shouldn't be part of a public "gotcha" campaign. Publication of test data — isolated from other evaluation measures — can be highly misleading.

It should be used only by teachers and their supervisors.

Teachers in Los Angeles cannot and should not wait for others to design a new teacher evaluation system. As the expert educators, we must take the lead in pushing for a system that ensures teacher quality and reflects the enormous challenges of teaching in Los Angeles.

James Encinas teaches fourth grade at Westminster Avenue Elementary School; Kyle Hunsberger teaches math at Cochran Middle School; Mike Stryer, a former Fairfax High School social studies teacher, leads teacher union reform efforts at Future is Now Schools.

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Wisconsin proposal gets serious about raising the bar for student achievement

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

By: Alan J. Borsuk

January 29, 2012

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/proposal-gets-serious-about-raising-the-bar-for-student-achievement-rv3vges-138276089.html>

What if you suddenly found out that half of the eighth-graders in Wisconsin, all kids you thought were highly rated readers, really didn't merit being called proficient? That instead of four out of five being pretty decent in math, it was really two out of five?

You better start thinking how you'd react because it's likely that is what's coming right at us. That's how dramatic a proposal last week by the state Department of Public Instruction is.

As parents, teachers, school leaders, politicians, community leaders and taxpayers, will we be motivated to do better? Will we see the need for change? Will we rise to the occasion? Or will we settle for being discouraged and basically locked into what we've come to expect?

Here's what's going on: With Congress failing to pass a revision, originally due in 2007, of the education law known as No Child Left Behind, the U.S. Department of Education has begun issuing waivers from the enforcement program of the increasingly dysfunctional law. Wisconsin wants a waiver - it's one of the things people such as Republican Gov. Scott Walker and Democratic-oriented Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers agree on. So a task force developed a proposal. People have until Feb. 3 to react to the proposal and the application is to be submitted Feb. 21.

The plan will change a lot of important dynamics of what students and schools in Wisconsin are expected to accomplish. It calls for publicly rating all schools on a 1 to 100 point scale, with student outcomes as a key factor. Schools that score low will face orders to improve and, possibly, closing. And that goes for every school with students whose education is paid for with public dollars - in other words, private schools in the voucher programs for Milwaukee and Racine kids are included.

Overall, the waiver plan means we are at the point where Wisconsin gets serious about raising expectations for student achievement. Wisconsin is regarded as having one of the lowest bars in the U.S. for rating a student as proficient. No more, the proposal says.

A new generation of state standardized tests is due in 2014-'15. But the waiver proposal says that, even as we continue using the current tests, known as the Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination (WKCE), kids statewide won't be rated using the current measuring stick, beginning next year. They'll be rated by the standards used by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). And NAEP is a much tougher grader.

How much tougher? Here's the comparison, based on results of the state tests from November 2010 (the most recent available results) and the results for NAEP testing of Wisconsin kids in early 2011:

Eighth-grade reading: Using the WKCE measuring stick, 86% of students were rated as "advanced" or "proficient." Using the NAEP measuring stick, it was 35% - a 51-point difference. At least as vivid: Using the WKCE measure, 47% of eighth-graders were "advanced," the top bracket. Using the NAEP measure, it was 3%. Three percent! In other words, only a handful of kids statewide would be labeled advanced under the new system, not the nearly half we're used to.

Fourth-grade reading: On the WKCE scale, 82% were proficient or advanced. On the NAEP scale, it was 33%.

Eighth-grade math: WKCE, 78% proficient. NAEP: 41%.

Fourth-grade math: WKCE: 79% proficient. NAEP: 47%.

Clearly, either we're going to drive down the picture of our children's achievement by a huge amount or we're going to drive up what a large number of them achieve. Or, perhaps, both will happen, in that order and over a few years. And all this at a time when the picture for school budgets is getting tighter and issues such as morale among teachers and principals and the future of those professions need to be taken very seriously.

(One thought: Think what these higher bars are going to mean to schools and districts where the percentages of kids rated as proficient are already small, which is to say, in most of Milwaukee.)

In a news release, Evers made a very interesting statement: "Increasing our expectations of what students need to know and be able to do, to match the reality of the 21st century, will not be easy."

As a reader pointed out to me, increasing expectations shouldn't be that hard. Why not have high expectations for every child and school? It's increasing the actual results that ought to be hard.

I asked Evers about this. He said both expectations and results are hard to increase. Change isn't easy.

The future job market, he said, will require today's students to do more analysis, more "higher-level thinking," as educators call it. In simple terms, they need to be better educated than kids of the past.

The nationwide education standards plan that Wisconsin is joining and the new testing regimen that is coming both are premised on the NAEP levels for rating student performance. Evers said Wisconsin needs to adopt the NAEP rating system if it is to get the federal waiver.

But in the bigger picture, he said, it's not just about pleasing federal officials. Evers' statement said the waiver request "is driven by the belief that increasing rigor across the standards, assessment and accountability system will result in improved instruction and improved student outcomes."

On the phone, he said, "This is an opportunity for this state to move forward. . . . After this transition time, our system will be better." He added, "The teachers and the students of the state are ready for this move. It's a whole new world."

Brace yourself. And order extra large servings of expectations, hope and willingness on everyone's part to seek and support improvement.

Alan J. Borsuk is senior fellow in law and public policy at Marquette University Law School. Reach him at alan.borsuk@marquette.edu.

More information on the DPI's school accountability proposal can be found at dpi.wi.gov/home.html

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Louisiana Governor Jindal pay plan ends old practice

Baton Rouge Advocate

By: Will Sentell

January 30, 2012

<http://theadvocate.com/home/1907316-125/jindalpay-planends-oldpractice.html>

Across-the-board raises to be cut out

Gov. Bobby Jindal is proposing a form of merit pay for public school teachers, which could end the practice of across-the-board pay hikes as well as raises of any kind for teachers rated as ineffective, officials said.

The plan is part of Jindal's wide-ranging public schools agenda for 2012, which he unveiled on Jan. 17.

The governor said his aim is to "keep good teachers by stopping forced pay increases to ineffective teachers, allowing them to pay effective teachers more."

The change, if approved by lawmakers, could reduce or even eliminate the longtime practice of schools districts enacting across-the-board increases when funds are available.

"Traditionally most district pay raises are across the board," said Rapides Parish Superintendent Gary Jones, former president of the Louisiana Association of School Superintendents.

A teacher's years of experience and college degrees play key roles, Jones noted.

But Louisiana this fall will launch a new evaluation system for many public school teachers, with half of the review linked to the growth of student achievement and the other half based on classroom observations by principals and others.

Jindal has not spelled out details of his teacher pay proposal, which will be outlined in legislation filed for the 2012 regular legislative session that begins on March 12.

In theory, the estimated 10 percent of teachers rated as "ineffective" on future evaluations could be the ones denied pay raises.

Those "effective" or "highly effective" could be targeted for merit-style pay boosts.

The state's top school board in December approved a plan that will link the job of many school teachers to how they fare on a scale to 1 to 5.

Scores of 2.0 to 4.0 will earn ratings of effective. Those from 4.1 to 5.0 will earn a highly effective label.

Scores of 1.9 and below means the state considers the teacher ineffective.

Any such plan would be similar to the Teacher Advancement Program, which is voluntary and sort of a pay-for-performance system.

Teacher ratings are based on how students fare in the classroom as well as day-to-day observations.

Those that make the grade qualify for bonuses in 81 of Louisiana's roughly 1,500 public schools.

Jones said the key, like the state's new evaluation system, is how students fare on key tests compared to how the state thinks they will do based on the student's previous academic record.

A similar plan operates in seven of the Ascension Parish school system's 28 schools, said Patrice Pujol, superintendent of the district. "We do additional pay for effectiveness," Pujol said.

Some superintendents have questions about Jindal's plan.

"I don't want to pay some teachers and not pay other teachers," said Warren Drake, who is superintendent of the Zachary school system, which is rated tops in the state.

Drake said it is important for principals and administrators to do a good job of evaluating teacher talent before they get tenure, which is a form of job protection that teachers generally earn after three years in the classroom.

Michael Faulk, superintendent of the Central school system, said linking teacher evaluations to student achievement is increasingly popular.

"That is a concept that is beginning to take hold across the country," said Faulk, who is president of the Louisiana Association of School Superintendents.

"The issue is the funding mechanism," he said. "Unless the school system has a large influx of money they may not be able to address it."

Louisiana has 48,271 public school teachers, according to the state Department of Education.

The average salary in 2010-11 was \$49,614, according to a state panel that tracks school trends.

However, local school districts have generally been hard-pressed in recent years to provide teacher pay raises amid slumping revenue and rising retirement and health-care costs.

In addition, teacher union leaders and others contend Louisiana's new teacher evaluation system is flawed.

They say it puts too much emphasis on linking the reviews to student test scores.

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Tennessee taps new pipeline for top teachers

The Tennessean

By: Julie Hubbard

January 29, 2012

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20120129/NEWS04/301240086/TN-taps-new-pipeline-top-teachers?odyssey=mod%7Cnewswell%7Ctext%7CFRONTPAGE%7Cs>

Students in the state's worst schools will find themselves led by teachers who didn't graduate with education degrees.

Instead, Tennessee education leaders plan to invest \$10 million on two national programs that recruit the brightest graduates in other fields, put them through intensive training and send them into classrooms — where they typically outperform peers who took the traditional route.

In its successful Race to the Top grant application, the state promised to build a pipeline to produce great teachers, said Chris Barbic, hired to head the Achievement School District and turn around Tennessee's lowest performers. It will use money from the \$501 million federal grant to hire up to 580 teachers from nonprofits Teach for America and the New Teacher Project, which will split the contract.

“Obviously, we want great teachers in schools that need them the most, and that is the mission of both of those organizations,” Barbic said. “The single most important factor in every school is a great school leader and great staff, and we believe both organizations create a good pipeline for great people.”

Barbic and Education Commissioner Kevin Huffman are Teach for America alums, and Huffman came to Tennessee from being the organization’s spokesman. The contract with both nonprofits was set before either took their jobs, but some veteran teachers are frustrated with the suggestion that they’re not doing their jobs well enough.

“I’m really tired of working very, very hard, with relative success, and yet being told I’m insufficient in some way,” said Nashville School of Arts English teacher Sheri Johnson, who has taught for 27 years. “It feels like every three days, there is some perception that what teachers are doing is incorrect.”

The Tennessee Education Association, the state’s largest teachers union, has heard a few complaints, mostly out of Memphis. There, the district laid off teachers while recruiting new ones from the nonprofits, said union President Gera Summerford.

“In general, there is a concern among professional educators that what really helps schools is stability and connection with the community,” she said.

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Iowa education leaders seek changes to Governor Branstad's reforms

Associated Press

By: Mike Glover

January 27, 2012

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-ap-ia-education-iowa.0.1816706.story>

JOHNSTON, Iowa – Two key Iowa education leaders warned Friday that Gov. Terry Branstad's plan to overhaul the state's schools relies too heavily on increased testing and does little to help teachers perform in the classroom.

Speaking on the public television program, "Iowa Press," teacher union head Mary Jane Cobb suggested Branstad needs to focus more on supporting teachers beyond recruiting and training.

"The big piece that's missing in the proposal that we see today is the piece about supporting teachers in the classroom," Cobb said. "There's a lot of emphasis on how we recruit them into the profession and how they exit the profession and not enough emphasis on what we do to support them in the classroom."

One piece of Branstad's proposal would require that all 11th graders take a college entrance exam, and Iowa Association of School Boards head Tom Downs questioned the need for that, noting it would cost \$1.5 million.

"I'm comfortable with raising the quality of the assessment, I'm comfortable with assessing the growth of a student over the year, but more testing for the purpose of testing leaves me with some questions," Downs said.

Education Department Director Jason Glass defended the proposal

"Sometimes you have to go against the grain of what conventional wisdom is telling us," Glass said. "We need to look at something like a college entrance exam, such as the ACT, so that every kid in Iowa has a key to get into college and be able to look at how our state is comparing against the other nine states where all students take the ACT. I believe our students will surprise us on how well they do on that assessment."

Branstad said his plan to overhaul schools by raising standards for becoming a teacher and boosting student testing is driven by a decline in performance of Iowa students on standardized tests, where they now rank in the middle of the pack of states.

"I think that may be the wrong driver for the conversation," Cobb said. "We need to be talking about building the capacity in our schools."

Downs said he favors expanding the core curriculum of math, science and language classes that all students must take.

"I'm supporting the expansion of the Iowa core and the improvement of assessments, maybe not more assessments or additional assessments, but better assessments and better quality assessment."

That focus on curriculum and assessment is the long-term key to upgrading schools, he argued.

"I don't want to focus on who the teachers are, I want to focus to be on what they're doing, the curriculum they're delivering," Downs said.

Cobb had a different focus.

"We think teachers need to have more time to spend together to collaborate, to help each other and critique their practice and improve," Cobb said. "That's not addressed in the plan."

Glass said weeding out teachers who aren't making the grade is tough, but essential.

"Those discussions are contentious, they're emotional," said Glass. "Iowa has to make a stand. We recognize the importance of the classroom educator as a big driver in what improves education."

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