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**To:**

**CC:**

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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 4/18/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 4/18/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### States Flesh Out Teacher Evaluation Frameworks

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

April 15, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/04/states\\_flesh\\_out\\_teacher\\_evalu.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/04/states_flesh_out_teacher_evalu.html)

As teacher-evaluation policies continue to emerge, several states are adding flesh to the outlines made in state law or in their winning Race to the Top bids.

Tennessee's [Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee](#) has released its blueprint for the state. You may recall that, according to a state law passed last year, 50% of the evaluation must be based on student academic achievement (35% on growth in test scores and 15% on alternate measures, such as graduation rates). The state eventually won a \$500 million grant in the federal competition.

For teachers in non-tested grades and subjects, the state will for now use *schoolwide* value-added growth rather than individual teacher value-added measures.

As much as teachers' unions have concerns about value-added for individual teacher evaluations, they're even [less sanguine about using schoolwide growth measures](#). That's partly because individual teachers' ratings will be based on the achievement of students with whom the teacher may have no contact.

Contrast Tennessee's approach with that of Rhode Island and select New York districts, [which are developing alternative measures for non-value-added grades and subjects](#).

In other news, Tennessee approved the Teacher Advancement Program's rubric for the four required principal observations that make up the other part of each teacher's evaluation. And Gov. Bill Haslam [approved a bill](#) that would tie the still-emerging evaluations to the state's tenure-granting process.

Colorado's [Council for Educator Effectiveness](#), meanwhile, just released [nearly 200 pages of recommendations](#) on teacher evaluation. A bill approved by the legislature last year, S. 191, requires performance-based teacher evaluations for all teachers, which will ultimately be linked to tenure-granting, layoff, and dismissal decisions.

The report lays out a specific evaluation framework for the state, but there will be flexibility for districts to weight some of the components according to local needs, as the *Denver Post* [reports](#).

Two things in the Colorado report warrant a particular mention. First, the panel report underscores that the system should help support the development of better teachers, not just "sort" them into categories. Second, it outlines the challenges that different kinds of teachers and schools—i.e., rural, urban, high school, elementary school—might face in putting the system into practice.

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## Putting our students first

Chicago Tribune

By: Rahm Emanuel

April 17, 2011

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/ct-perspec-0417-rahm-20110417.0.5863688.story>

*The stars are aligning at CPS. Seize the moment!*

Nothing is more critical to Chicago's future than our children's education. And yet for years we have cheated them. From kindergarten through 12th grade, a child in Houston goes to school more than three years longer than a student in Chicago. It's no wonder only half of Chicago Public Schools' students graduate from high school.

We are at a turning point.

The education reform legislation that passed the Illinois Senate last week provides a model for action and a window for change. While some leaders across the country have frozen out stakeholders in order to advance a partisan agenda, elected officials and stakeholders in Illinois embraced the public's demand for reform and passed a unanimous agreement. If the House passes the bill and Gov. Pat Quinn signs it into law, Chicago students will be able to compete and win on an even playing field against others from around the country and the world.

The results will be meaningful:

- A longer school day and year on par with those of students in other major cities.
- Compensating teachers like the professionals they are.
- Reforming tenure to ensure that teachers are retained based on their quality.
- Raising the threshold on the number of teachers who would have to vote for a strike to ensure that students aren't held hostage.

Technology and resources can enhance a child's education, but they can't make up for missing fundamentals: well-trained teachers, accountable principals, involved parents. Springfield can deliver the tools CPS needs to succeed. But it's up to Chicago to advance those reforms that will put our students first.

Rewarding teachers for success is a good first step. We also need to train new teachers and better train the ones we have. We should grow the ranks of top-flight educators by expanding our urban teacher residency program. This will add 160 highly qualified teachers to the corps each year, each of them committed to teaching for a minimum of five years in Chicago Public Schools.

At the helm of every school, we need a principal who is driven, innovative and accountable. Adopting performance contracts between each principal and the CPS will help us achieve that goal. These performance contracts would set clear expectations for student achievement and hold the principal accountable for results. Principals who achieve their performance goals should be recognized and rewarded with bonuses, just as we reward teacher excellence.

Our teachers and principals can't succeed without parents as their partners in education. But if we expect parents to be partners, we should treat them like partners. Parents should have access to the same information about school performance that principals receive. And if a school fails to educate students year after year, parents should have the right to change that school. Implementing a "parent trigger" would give a majority of parents the ability to shut down a consistently failing school and bring in a new operator capable of meeting the needs of their children.

Parental involvement means more accountability and responsibility.

Chicago should institute parent-teacher contracts at the beginning of the school year. Parents will be asked to limit TV and video game time and to read with their children regularly. Parents will be empowered with knowledge and control over the education their children receive; in return, they will be asked to become full partners in the process of giving their kids a quality education.

We now have the tools to bring a culture of accountability to the Chicago Public Schools, something that has been missing for years. Principals have the power to reward and promote teachers based on their performance, not just their seniority. Teachers have the right incentives to focus on our children rather than the bureaucracy. And parents will be held accountable and rewarded for being involved in their child's educational success.

Let's seize this moment. I've seen many a policy battle, and I know how rarely the stars align. The public has demanded reform, stakeholders are off the sidelines, and all parties are working together. Springfield is on the verge of giving Chicago the building blocks we have spent years waiting for.

Let's finish the job.

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## Incoming Schools Chancellor Seeks Calmer Debate

New York Times

By: Sharon Otterman

April 16, 2011

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/nyregion/incoming-ny-schools-chancellor-seeks-calmer-debate.html?\\_r=1&ref=education](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/nyregion/incoming-ny-schools-chancellor-seeks-calmer-debate.html?_r=1&ref=education)

[Dennis M. Walcott](#) said Saturday that he planned to use a softer touch as New York City's new schools chancellor to ease the bitter rhetorical battles that have caused wide divisions among teachers, parents and bureaucrats. But Mr. Walcott also made it clear that he did not plan any major shifts in [Education Department](#) policy.

Speaking at Teachers College at [Columbia University](#) in his first speech since his appointment April 7, Mr. Walcott called the current tenor of the debates over teacher layoffs, standardized testing and [charter schools](#) "poisonous," and he acknowledged it had led to morale problems among teachers.

"People on both sides of this debate have been guilty of contributing to the current polarized atmosphere," Mr. Walcott said. "I view my transition to the role of chancellor as an opportunity for us to begin anew."

Mr. Walcott offered an olive branch to the administration's critics, including the city teachers' union, saying, "Too often we hear that all of our problems would be solved if we could just get rid of bad teachers." But he also defended Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#)'s handling of the school system over the past nine years, a system Mr. Walcott had been an integral part of as the deputy mayor in charge of education. And when he described the middle ground he would seek on contentious issues, he reiterated the main thrust of the administration's current policies.

On teacher layoffs, Mr. Walcott said he would continue Mr. Bloomberg's push to overturn a law requiring layoffs by seniority. In remarks to reporters after his speech, Mr. Walcott maintained that the city still had to reduce the teaching force by more than 6,100 teachers to balance its budget, and he estimated that the job losses would increase the average class size, which has been on the rise for a few years, by at least one more student.

On standardized tests, Mr. Walcott offered primarily a defense of the tests' value, though he acknowledged the need for a broad curriculum, not one based only on test preparation. "At the end of the day," he said, "tests are a part of life."

On charter schools, Mr. Walcott said opponents had to understand that the real issue was parental choice, a mantra of the charter school movement. "It's about providing great options for parents," he said. "Everything else is just noise."

But he also talked about getting the city's many agencies to work together better to address the deep problems caused by poverty, including by providing more after-school activities. And Mr. Walcott emphasized his role as a sort of listener in chief, playfully warning that he planned to visit so many schools that the city's reporters would have to wear track shoes to keep up.

The appearance at Teachers College was originally scheduled for [Cathleen P. Black](#), and would have been an opportunity to publicly articulate her goals as schools chancellor. But on April 7, Mr. Bloomberg asked her to resign amid low approval ratings in the polls, the departures of several deputies and concerns about her ability to master the complexities of the job.

In contrast with Ms. Black, who was harangued at some public appearances, Mr. Walcott was warmly received, and several teachers thanked him for a promise to highlight their hard work. But when he answered questions, he was light on specifics.

Weg Wint, a long-serving teacher in the Bronx, asked Mr. Walcott how he planned to address what she called the "revolving door of teachers" at her school, in which young teachers are trained at the city's expense and then leave after several years.

"Those who remain faithfully behind," Ms. Wint said, "those are the ones who in the end are being blamed for what goes on in the system."

Mr. Walcott responded by talking about tougher rules for teacher tenure and stressing that he would give all teachers more respect and support.

"I still did not receive my answer," Ms. Wint said afterward.

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**FLORIDA NEWS**

# Virtual School Expansion Poised for House Floor Vote

News Service Florida

By: Lilly Rockwell

April 18, 2011

<http://www.sunshinestatenews.com/story/virtual-school-expansion-poised-house-floor-vote>

*Rep. Kelli Stargell: Kids are used to getting information online*

A major expansion of Florida's virtual school programs is poised for a House floor vote after swift approval from a House committee on Friday.

But a similar measure in the Senate has stalled after questions were raised about its costs to the state.

The House measure (HB 7197) was approved with a substantial amendment after little debate or questions in the House Appropriations Committee on Friday. Only Rep. Franklin Sands, D-Weston, voted "no" after saying the committee was not given enough time to digest the 38-page amendment to the bill.

The bill allows taxpayer-funded charter schools to open full-time K-12 "virtual" charter schools in which classes can be taught on a computer by an instructor located elsewhere.

It also requires students to take an online class before graduating from high school, beginning as soon as 2011.

School districts would also have to offer full-time and part-time virtual instruction to students, through their own programs or by contracting with a third-party provider approved by the Department of Education.

But critics of the increased use of K-12 virtual schools say that quality suffers without frequent face-to-face engagement with teachers and that schools play an important watchdog role in child welfare.

Rep. Kelli Stargel defended virtual classes as the way younger generations are programmed to learn.

"Kids are comfortable online, they Google everything," said Stargel, R-Lakeland. "They are used to getting information from an online provider." Stargel acknowledged that online classes have the added benefit of being cheaper than traditional classrooms, thereby saving the state money. "Yes, it will be less expensive," she said.

A similar Senate bill (SB 1620) allows for a much bigger expansion of state-funded virtual schools, permitting a virtual school company from outside of Florida to offer K-12 instruction to any student in the state, even private school and home-schooled students, with the state picking up the tab.

The bill was set to be heard Friday in the Senate Budget Committee but is stalled after Sen. J.D. Alexander, the chairman of the committee, expressed concerns about the cost to the state.

Because the measure allows home school and private school students to enroll in a state-funded virtual school, enrollment and costs to the state could dramatically increase.

There are over 62,000 home school students and over 313,000 private school students in Florida. If only 1 percent of those students enrolled in virtual programs and received state funding it could cost the state \$19 million.

"I need to know a little bit more about what our budget allocations are going to look like before I take a \$20 million impact bill forward," said Alexander, R-Lake Wales.

But his concerns may be soothed by an amendment to the bill that puts it in line with the House version. Under that version, the doors to virtual schools would not be thrown open to private school and home-schooled students.

This Senate proposal may only have one more shot to become law. Next week the Senate is taking time off and then returns for its last week of committee meetings on April 25.

Schools say the push for more virtual classes comes with some drawbacks.

"It's a mixed bag," said Vernon Pickup-Crawford, a lobbyist for school districts, calling the House version "at least more reasonable." Pickup-Crawford said many schools like the increased flexibility of being allowed to offer part-time or full-time virtual classes. But the House bill still doesn't allow schools to offer classes outside the regular school day and does not pay extra for "credit recovery" classes students take virtually after failing the first time.

The bill also requires schools to provide facilities and equipment for testing, which costs schools money, he said.

Brian Kennedy, with the National Coalition for Public School Options, which is a parent-organized group that supports school choices beyond traditional public schools, has been watching the bills in Florida closely.

Kennedy said what Florida is trying to do isn't unusual. States like Arizona and Idaho offer statewide virtual K-12 programs, he said, and have far larger enrollment. Though SB 1620 is favored by virtual school proponents, he called the scaled-back House version a "small step forward on an important issue."

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## **Palm Beach County school district says it'll need more time, money to switch to digital textbooks**

Palm Beach Post

By: Jason Schultz

April 17, 2011

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/schools/palm-beach-county-school-district-says-itll-need-1408921.html>

As the state tries to push textbooks into the digital age in the next two years, the Palm Beach County School District sees an issue fraught with short-term problems.

"The majority of the districts in the state will not be able to do it " in that time frame, said William Purtell, a district instructional materials specialist .

"Palm Beach County is way ahead of most counties, and I don't even think Palm Beach County could be 50 percent digital in two years."

The bill, which passed the House last week but must still pass the full Legislature, would require districts to spend half their instructional material money on digital books starting in 2013 and then convert to digital textbooks starting in the 2014-2015 school year.

The district's lobbyist, Vern Pickup-Crawford, wants legislators to give districts more time and flexibility rather than requiring a wholesale instant shift .

District officials agree that digital technology is the way to go and will eventually save money, but say it needs to be done slowly. Purtell said it would take until at least 2017 to go to digital textbooks.

The problems with trying to replace paper textbooks with digital devices such as Kindles or iPads are mainly about money, said Gary Weidenhamer, school district educational technology director.

"We could be ready in a year if we had the money," Weidenhamer said.

Palm Beach County School District officials could not put a total cost on switching all students to digital devices, but said they would top \$30 million.

Purtell said just buying the roughly 172,000 students each a digital device would cost at least \$20 million, depending on the device and whether the district could get a deal for buying in bulk.

But Weidenhamer said using digital textbooks was more complicated than just buying devices.

The district would have to expand its Internet infrastructure so that hundreds of thousands of students could wirelessly access the Internet at the same time in classrooms.

Adding that bandwidth would cost at least \$9.8 million, Information Technology Director Deepak Agarwal said, although the district could get much of that cost reimbursed by the federal government.

Once students can get online, the district would have to invest more money in creating Internet security, said Ken Cohen, a member of the district's budget advisory committee. Otherwise students could download either inappropriate material or computer viruses .

Pickup-Crawford also cited a "digital divide" problem: Students might need to access the Internet at home to do homework and not every family can afford Internet access.

Board member Karen Brill called moving to digital textbooks "paramount to our progress" and said the district should be making the transition to digital regardless of the state bill. But Brill acknowledged the technical and financial issues and said it would take at least five years .

Even though the district would not have to pay for printing and shipping of books, Purtell said, most of the cost is buying the content in the book, and publishers typically charge about the same for digital content as print.

The district spent about \$13.9 million on new instructional materials for most science classes for the next school year. Students will still get printed textbooks, but supplemental materials such as lab workbooks will only be available through work stations in classrooms or online if students have computer access at home.

Getting the supplemental science material digitally will save the district about \$2 million, Weidenhamer said . Purtell said one elementary school science book plus instructional material would have cost the district \$65 if it was all in print, but is costing only \$51.50 next year .

Purtell estimated the district could save up to 25 percent of the cost of a book by going digital but estimated it would need to save at least 40 percent to be able to pay for devices and infrastructure.

Also, state rules bar schools from using instructional materials money for books to buy digital devices or create the Internet infrastructure to run them, Weidenhamer said.

State Rep. Marti Coley, R-Marianna, who sponsored the house bill, said the money is there and the conversion is doable . The bill would let districts use 50 percent of their instructional material money to buy devices .

Despite the hurdles, the district is experimenting . It bought about 200 iPads that students in nine schools started using in January. Students still have paper textbooks they take home; the iPads stay in the classroom, Weidenhamer said. The 200 iPads cost about \$500 each.

Pinellas County has taken one of the biggest leaps into digital textbooks in the state. Last year it gave more than 2,000 students at Clearwater High School Kindle e-book readers.

Brill said the Kindle is not the right device for the district. While Kindles are cheaper than iPads and text can be downloaded on the Kindle that can be read without an Internet connection, it is just text . Without interactive programs such as videos or quizzes, a Kindle is basically a book on a screen.

"You cannot teach trigonometry on a Kindle," Pickup-Crawford said.

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## Program helps to open doors to private schools

Ocala Star Banner

By: Melinda Carstensen

April 16, 2011

<http://www.ocala.com/article/20110416/ARTICLES/110419750/1001/NEWS01?p=all&tc=pgall>

When Gina Padró switched from public to private school last year, she wasn't scared. In fact, Gina, now a sixth-grader at Shores Christian Academy in Ocala, made the choice herself with her parents' support.

However, the state also gave Gina a boost: She is one of about 33,000 students in Florida and 697 in Marion County who receive tuition assistance through the Step Up For Students program, which helps low-income families send their children to private school.

Step Up is funded through the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which allows private corporations to donate money to the program instead of paying corporate income taxes to the state. Companies may pay up to 75 percent of their tax this way. Another program, the Carrie Meek Foundation Inc., is funded through the FTC program but benefits only students in South Florida.

Since Step Up's 2001 inception, corporations have contributed more than \$700 million to the program. Although no contributing corporations are based in Ocala, among those that have a local presence include AT&T, Lowe's and Walgreen Co.

To be eligible, students must be entering kindergarten or first grade or, like Gina, be transferring from public to private school. Students are selected through an online application process, and administrators give preference to renewal applicants.

In Marion County, the number of students enrolled in the program has nearly doubled in the past three years, and more may be coming: The 2011-2012 online application portal for new students opened this month.

Meanwhile, the number of Marion schools involved in the program has increased from 13 in the 2007-2008 school year to 22 in 2010-2011. All of the Marion County private schools that currently have scholarship students reapplied for FTC program eligibility this year through the Florida Department of Education.

*'A blessing for us'*

Gina said the small class sizes at Shores Christian prompted her to apply there instead of starting at Lake Weir Middle School. Including her, Shores Christian has 51 students enrolled in Step Up — 40 percent of the school's enrollment.

"When I first came here, I knew almost everybody," Gina said. "I feel more comfortable here."

Gina's mother, Patricia, said she values Shores' Christian-based teachings, its uniforms and its small classes. So, after a friend whose daughter once attended Shores Christian told her about Step Up, she went online and applied.

"It [Step Up for Students] has helped my daughter so much," said Padró, who works as a certified nursing assistant and a

convenience store clerk. “For children that need to go to private schools, it’s very important. For people who can’t afford the tuition, they can still send their children there.”

Step Up scholarships are need-based. For a new applicant in a family of four to receive the maximum scholarship — \$4,106 this year — the family income must be no more than \$3,446 per month. For scholarship renewals that income standard is adjusted and, depending on income, the student may be awarded a full or partial scholarship. New applicants can receive only the full, not partial, scholarship amount, so they must meet that income requirement.

Jon Davison said it “just wouldn’t be possible” to send his three children to Shores Christian if it weren’t for the program.

“It’s been a blessing for us,” said Davison, who teaches history and physical education at Shores Christian.

Like Gina and her family, Davison said he and his wife, who teaches English at Shores Christian, value the one-on-one interaction between students and teachers that the private school environment offers.

“It’s not that we have a problem with public schools,” he said. “You just have more of a relationship with your teacher [at private schools].”

### *Saving money or hurting schools?*

Some question whether the Legislature should support the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program, considering the state’s financial woes and cuts to public education. School funding is based on the number of students in attendance, so funding to public schools is cut when students leave for private school.

“The quote-unquote fact that the program saves the state money is a myth,” said Mark Pudlow, spokesman for the Florida Education Association, a union that represents teachers.

Pudlow said that when a student body size is reduced by only a handful of students, the state gives less money to that school — but the school’s operating costs basically remain the same.

“They still have to turn on the electricity in that school. They still have to provide transportation. They don’t get to take a teacher away. They don’t get to take a bus away,” he said. “The costs will still be there; it’s just the money isn’t gonna be there.”

Pudlow also said that public schools undergo more scrutiny from the state than private schools do, with more standardized tests given at public schools and teachers being measured according to students’ performance.

“Why is it that one tax dollar — the one that I give — has to go to a public school, and the one that Mr. Corporate puts in goes to a group that nobody does any scrutiny of?” he asked. “That’s a double standard for tax dollars. They ought to be given out in the same manner.”

However, one research agency indicates the FTC program actually saves the state money. According to a March 2010 report from the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, the Legislature’s research arm, the FTC program saved Florida about \$36.2 million in the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

That amount is the difference between the amount — \$118.4 million — not sent to public schools and the amount — \$82.2 million — in forgone revenue tax.

That’s a significant savings, said Deborah Brodsky, director of the Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability.

While operating cost savings on an individual public school basis may not be obvious, she said, the savings are at the state level.

“There’s 33,000 students in the program — that has an impact on class-size reduction,” said Brodsky.

A resolution regarding the legality of a similar tax-credit scholarship program in Arizona also may be hushing Florida critics.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Arizona taxpayers who said a state program unlawfully awarded corporation-donated money that belonged to Arizona to religious private schools.

Justices rejected the challenge in a 5-4 ruling, saying taxpayers didn’t have to contribute to the program themselves.

Step Up For Students president Doug Tuthill said that even though Step Up and the Arizona program are different, the recent court ruling further emphasizes the legality of parents’ choices to educate their children in the way they feel best suits them.

According to <http://stepupforstudents.org>, 81 percent of Step Up schools are faith-based.

“There have been consistent [U.S.] Supreme Court rulings saying parents are allowed to educate their children in a religious school provided it’s the parent’s choice and not the government’s choice,” Tuthill said. “I think the key is it’s not being coerced by the government. It’s really the decision of the individual.”

## *Popular in Marion*

As far as Marion County goes, it's clear more parents are taking advantage of the options that Step Up offers.

During the 2007-2008 school year, 353 students in 13 Marion private schools were enrolled, according to Adam Emerson, the program's spokesman. Today, in the 2010-2011 school year, 697 students are enrolled in 22 private schools.

That 97 percent growth rate in enrollment outpaced the state for the same period, Emerson said.

Not to mention there were about 7,000 students statewide on the program's waiting list last year, with 140 in Marion, according to Emerson. Because the state caps the number of tax credits corporations can receive for their contributions, not every eligible student who applies for the program can be admitted.

"Families are becoming more aware of us than ever before," Emerson said.

He said the program does not aim to discourage public school attendance, as every student learns differently.

"Our program exists because we don't believe every school can teach every child," Emerson said. "Low-income students can struggle in even the best schools."

To hold accountable schools that accept scholarship students, last year the Legislature began requiring administrators to give their scholarship students standardized, norm-referenced tests to track academic progress. Also, it began requiring schools that received at least \$250,000 in scholarship revenue to provide financial reports to show how they are spending the money.

Parents and students also can vote with their feet: The full scholarship amount, \$4,106, isn't enough to cover the cost at some private schools. The average parent with a scholarship student still pays about \$1,000 per school year, Emerson said.

"They'll move their children if they don't feel like the school is meeting their needs," Tuthill said. "That puts a lot of pressure on the schools to be very student-focused."

Kevin Christian, public information officer for Marion County public schools, said he wasn't very familiar with the program but that if it gives parents more choices, the scholarship isn't a bad thing.

"We respect the right that parents have to make the decision they feel [is] right for their children," Christian said. "If children can benefit from an environment that their parents feel is more appropriate for them, then sure."

## *Future funding*

At the end of the current legislative session, in early May, the Legislature will have decided the scholarship's per-pupil value for 2011-2012.

Since 2001, that value has fluctuated. Although the Legislature used to determine the value, today it is based on a percentage of the Florida Education Finance Program.

The FEFP is the money the Legislature spends to operate public schools. This year the FTC program was indexed at 60 percent of the FEFP — meaning a full scholarship (\$4,106) was 60 percent of the Legislature's 2010-2011 budget per public school student of \$6,844.

In 2009-10, a full scholarship was \$3,950, or about 58 percent of the \$6,863 per-pupil budget.

That percentage is determined by the amount of money that companies donate (in lieu of state tax) to the program. Tuthill said the program's goal is to try its best to meet the needs of the community no matter the money allotted.

"If more parents want to participate in the program, it will grow," Tuthill said. "If more parents don't want to participate, it won't."

Despite its popularity and growth, the program has ample room to grow. He said most students who benefit from Step Up received free or reduced-priced lunch in public schools, and there about 1.2 million of those students in Florida.

"We're barely scratching the surface of that population," he said.

Gina, who considers herself "lucky" to be a scholarship recipient, said she hopes to become a registered nurse someday. She said she thinks the private-school environment will help her achieve that goal.

"I know I can be something big in my career," Gina said. "I just want to help people."

Her mother said she doesn't know where Gina would be without the program.

"We appreciate it so much, my husband and I," she said. "It's really the best thing that ever happened to her."

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Quinn lauds unions, lawmakers for education bill**

Associated Press

By: Staff

April 15, 2011

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/politics/2011/04/quinn-lauds-unions-lawmakers-education-bill>

Gov. Pat Quinn lauded teachers unions and lawmakers after an education overhaul bill passed the Illinois Senate.

Quinn on Friday called students and parents the winners in the bill that included major concessions on job security and teachers strikes and keeps unions from blocking additional instructional time in Chicago classrooms.

The measure now heads to the Illinois House. Quinn predicted Illinois would have the "most fundamental overhaul and reform of education" that it's had in a long time.

The legislation was the result of agreement between reform advocates, unions and education administrators.

Quinn called the legislation a "good product." He said Illinois has teamwork unlike other states like Wisconsin.

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### **House Bill on Student Testing Reopens a Familiar Debate**

New York Times

By: Morgan Smith

April 16, 2011

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/us/17ttstudents.html?\\_r=1&ref=education](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/us/17ttstudents.html?_r=1&ref=education)

When Representative Rob Eissler, Republican of The Woodlands, brought House Bill 500 to the Texas House floor on April 6, he emphasized what it did not do.

It did not, he said, lower testing standards. Nor did it delay the planned 2011-12 rollout of the state's more rigorous Staar exams.

Mr. Eissler was setting out to correct what he called the "misrepresentations" and "false claims" surrounding the bill, which, despite its overwhelming support in the House — more than two-thirds of his colleagues signed on to it, and only five voted against it — has generated vocal opposition from some within education circles who view it as a dramatic retreat from hard-won reforms.

The bill also reveals a divergence between the Legislature's two public education chiefs — Mr. Eissler, who heads the House Public Education Committee, and his counterpart in the upper chamber, Senator Florence Shapiro, Republican of Plano — on how the state should hold students and educators accountable.

Ms. Shapiro staunchly supports moving forward with the testing standards in H.B. 3, the 2009 legislation that set up the transition to the new Staar exams from the state's current TAKS subject area tests .

"It's a shame that it's happened at the very same time that we are having problems with the budget," Ms. Shapiro said, "but that doesn't change the idea that this is the direction we should be going."

Worried about how operating with fewer teachers will affect classroom instruction and whether they will be able to afford updated textbooks, districts have pushed to delay the new exams.

H.B. 500 makes significant modifications to H.B. 3, with the goals of reducing costs and easing districts' concerns that the new testing regimen could lead to large numbers of students failing to graduate. Instead of the end-of-course Staar exams counting 15 percent of a student's final grade, H.B. 500 permits school districts to set their own policies. It also would allow districts to suspend a new requirement that students receive a cumulative score on 12 exams in four subject areas to graduate; instead, students would have to pass a total of four exams, one in each subject.

Business groups — including the Texas Association of Business, the Texas Coalition for a Competitive Workforce and the Austin Chamber of Commerce — oppose the measure because they believe it represents a step back for student accountability.

Drew Scheberle, a senior vice president at the Austin Chamber, said H.B. 500 "represents the first time in 25 years that we would actually reduce the expectations for graduation."

To some extent, the divide between Mr. Eissler and Ms. Shapiro is a rehashing of an old battle between the House and Senate on student testing.

"This is basically a fight we had two years ago in conference committee, when the Senate wanted the standards as they are on the books today, and the House wanted relaxed graduation standards," said Andrew C. Erben, president of the Texas Institute for Education Reform, which opposes Mr. Eissler's bill.

The House more than the Senate has traditionally aligned with school districts on student accountability, Mr. Scheberle said. "The House has not always been the strongest on this issue," he said. "It has usually been the Senate."

Now, lawmakers in the House are looking for ways to soften the blow of their stark budget, which allocates about \$4 billion less to public education than the Senate. "The House is dealing in a very different arena than the Senate is dealing," Ms. Shapiro said. "If I was in their shoes and didn't have money for textbooks, I didn't have any money to keep our teachers or to keep our schools whole, I would be looking for ways to lessen the pressure, too."

Mr. Eissler told his colleagues that his bill represented the "middle ground" between those who want a delay of the Staar tests and those who want to hold firm. On Friday, he acknowledged he had "some missionary work" to do in the Senate.

"It's not like there's a difference in philosophy," he said. "It's a difference in application. Florence Shapiro and I agree that we need to have rigor, relevance, and responsibility or strong accountability, but how that translates to day-to-day operation in the school district is what made H.B. 500."

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## Emanuel Gets Boost, and Challenges, in Schools Bill

New York Times

By: Rebecca Vevea

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[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/us/17cncschools.html?\\_r=2&ref=education](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/us/17cncschools.html?_r=2&ref=education)

A sweeping public school reform bill unanimously approved late Thursday by the State Senate gives Mayor-elect [Rahm Emanuel](#) a chance to fulfill a campaign promise and lengthen Chicago's school day, currently one of the shortest in the nation. But first he will have to overcome daunting budget, educational and labor obstacles.

Chicago would be the first major city in recent years to add substantial time to its school day, which currently clocks in at 5 hours 45 minutes for elementary schools and 6 hours for high schools. Chicago students spend 270 hours less in the classroom every year than students in New York City schools, or about 41 fewer days.

On Friday morning, in an appearance at the Johnson College Prep [charter school](#), Mr. Emanuel applauded the legislation enabling a longer school day. "Everybody around the country is now looking at this as a role model," he said.

The legislation resulted from three months of intense negotiation among lawmakers and key players in education from throughout the state. Important questions remain, however, including how much additional classroom time there will be, how it should be used, and how to pay for it.

The bill gives the Chicago Public Schools administration the power to unilaterally decide the length of its day and year, but the details of carrying out the decision will have to be ironed out in bargaining with the powerful Chicago Teachers Union.

If the Chicago Public Schools add one hour each day and an additional day to the school year, it would cost roughly \$300 million, according to the most recent estimate by the district. The district said it now faces an \$820 million deficit.

Karen Lewis, president of the teachers union, acknowledged the deficit but not the district's claims of its severity. "I don't believe those numbers," she said.

Jonah Edelman, director of [Stand for Children](#), an education-reform organization that helped draft the bill, said, "The ball now is in the mayor-elect and Chicago Public Schools' court, to work with the Chicago Teachers Union on increasing instructional time."

Gov. [Pat Quinn](#) backs the bill, and supporters expect House approval by early May. The bill also tackles other weighty issues, including linking teacher tenure to performance rather than seniority, making it easier to remove ineffective teachers and making it harder for the union to strike.

The bill calls for several changes in the way a union could call a strike. If a bargaining impasse occurs, a third party would be appointed to conduct a 90-day "fact-finding" process and then make a recommendation to break the stalemate. If the union wanted to strike, it would have to wait an additional 30 days and obtain authorization from 75 percent of its membership. Currently, a majority of those casting votes is enough to start a walkout.

The bill's author, Senator Kimberly A. Lightford, Democrat of Maywood, said that in her conversations with Mr. Emanuel and Ms. Lewis she sensed that the two would work together on the issue, even in the face of a deficit.

"There are ways to negotiate that without it having a fiscal impact," Ms. Lightford said.

With Mr. Emanuel set to appoint his schools chief and with a union president who was elected less than a year ago, new faces will be at the table to iron out the details.

While the union agrees that a longer school day could improve education, Ms. Lewis said the issue is not that simple.

“I think they’re looking at some really small fixes as if this is going to be the magic bullet,” she said. “We’re at a real crossroads in education. With the emphasis on testing, we have narrowed the curriculum. I hope this will broaden the curriculum.”

Mr. Emanuel said Friday that he wants to hear from teachers “with ideas of how to improve that instructional time.”

“Should high school kids be more in math?” he asked. “Should younger kids be more in reading? Where’s our science?”

A report by the Center on Education Policy in 2007 found that since the passage of President [George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act](#), with its focus on test scores, about 44 percent of districts cut time from one or more subjects, including science, social studies, art, music and gym, as well as lunch and recess.

Improving test scores was the main focus of the Chicago district’s most recent effort to add instructional time at minimal cost. Its virtual-learning pilot program, installed at 15 elementary schools throughout this year, gives students one hour of reading and math curriculum on a computer at the end of their regular day.

No data have been gathered to indicate how effective the program has been, and no decisions have been made on its expansion, said Monica Lee, the school district official who developed it.

For many classroom teachers, like Sandy Blake, a third-grade teacher at Mary Lyon Elementary School, the debate over a longer school day sometimes seems to occur in another world.

In Ms. Blake’s classroom — where 29 desks pack the room, leaving little room to move in between — the day goes by in a blur. In the morning, she hands out 29 breakfasts, stopping frequently to help children open milk cartons and other packaging. Before math lessons, she hands out 29 math counters. She has a system for everything in order to use her time effectively.

But those systems can break down, and the short school day does not account for the usual distractions — putting on Band-Aids, getting tissues, writing notes and what Ms. Blake calls “comforting the social angst of third-grade girls.”

By the time students leave, Ms. Blake is tired. One recent afternoon, she walked her students out of the building and returned to her room at 2:45, technically for her lunch break.

“When I let them go, I say, Just one more hour, just one more,” Ms. Blake said with a sigh, contemplating the time remaining before she goes home.

While she believes more classroom time would help her students learn, she said she hopes people who are most affected will have a voice in how the school day was changed.

“You do the best you can, but the day does need to be longer,” Ms. Blake said. “I just hope that Emanuel and the new C.E.O. realize that it’s a conversation.”

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