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NATIONAL NEWS

ESEA Outlook Murky, Despite House Panel's Vote

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

March 7, 2012

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/07/23esea.h31.html>

The future of Republican-backed legislation to renew the Elementary and Secondary Education Act remains cloudy—even after the House education committee gave a pair of measures its seal of approval last week.

The two bills, both introduced by U.S. Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., the chairman of the committee, would give states much more running room in K-12 policy, a 180-degree pivot from the current version of the law, the decade-old No Child Left Behind Act. The measures, dealing with accountability and teacher-quality issues, passed Feb. 28 on a party-line vote of 23-16.

But some Republicans would like to see the bills go even further, gutting the U.S. Department of Education. And getting Democratic support for the measures—which would ultimately have to be signed by President Barack Obama—is a tall order. Democrats made it clear during committee debate that they think the bills are a step in the wrong direction.

The legislation "turn[s] its back on the civil rights promises of this nation: that every child deserves a fair shot at success, no matter what their background," said Rep. George Miller of California, the top Democrat on the panel.

But Rep. Kline sees it differently. He said the bills "untie the hands of state and local leaders who are clamoring for the opportunity to change the status quo and revive innovation in our classrooms."

And, in an interview after the markup of the bills, Rep. Kline said he hopes to get the legislation to the House floor this year. "We've got to keep the process moving forward," he said.

Legislative Hurdles

In the House, no floor action has been scheduled at this point, said a spokeswoman for Rep. Eric Cantor, R-Va., the majority leader.

Separately, the Senate education committee on Oct. 20 approved its own bill to reauthorize the ESEA.

But that measure's sponsor, U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, has said he's not going to move the legislation to the floor until the House of Representatives passes a bipartisan ESEA-renewal bill. It's unclear just how much Democratic support would be needed to qualify the bills as bipartisan in his view.

"There's no doubt that achieving bipartisan consensus on a critical and complex issue like education reform is difficult," Sen. Harkin said. "But it is not impossible. ... We achieved it just last fall in the [Senate education] committee."

The two top Republicans on the Senate education committee, Sens. Michael B. Enzi of Wyoming and Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, were in favor of the Senate bill. But most GOP lawmakers on the panel voted no.

Some Republicans on the House committee, meanwhile, want an even smaller role for the federal government.

For instance, at last week's House markup, Rep. Todd Rokita, R-Ind., introduced, then withdrew, an amendment that would have allowed states to opt out of federal funding for education and give the money back to taxpayers.

And if Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., had his way, the Education Department would be reduced to just one staff person, who would distribute best-practices information to states. K-12 policy just isn't a federal issue, he said in an interview.

Fans and Detractors

The House Education and the Workforce Committee approved two separate pieces of legislation, one aimed at accountability,

and the other at teacher quality. The accountability bill, called the Student Success Act, would dismantle adequate yearly progress, or AYP, the controversial yardstick at the heart of the NCLB law, and allow states to craft their own accountability systems.

It would no longer require states to test students in science. And it would scrap the School Improvement Grant program, which offers resources to states to turn around their lowest-performing schools.

The teacher bill would require states and districts to craft teacher-evaluation systems tied in part to student achievement. And it would get rid of many targeted federal programs, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which covers after-school activities, in favor of block grants to states and districts.

The House legislation has fans and detractors. The [American Association of School Administrators](#) and the [National School Boards Association](#) have officially endorsed the measures, applauding the flexibility for local districts.

But the [Tri-Caucus](#), a group of powerful House lawmakers representing districts with many black, Hispanic, and Asian students, says the bills are a big step back on accountability, particularly for subgroups of students, such as racial minorities and English-language learners.

And 38 business and civil rights groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Council of La Raza, and the Education Trust, share those concerns.

Formula Fight

During House committee consideration, lawmakers voted to accept an amendment from Rep. Rokita that would seek to reduce the number of staff employees at the Education Department.

But another amendment, which rural school advocates have long pushed, went down to defeat. The provision, introduced by Rep. Glenn Thompson, R-Pa., would have revamped the Title I funding formula, which distributes money for disadvantaged students. Now, the formula favors high-population areas, such as Montgomery County, Md., one of the richest counties in the country, over smaller, rural school systems like those in Mr. Thompson's western Pennsylvania district. The change would have been phased in over four years.

Rep. Thompson contended that such a change would be a matter of fairness. But Rep. Miller, the panel's senior Democrat, argued that the provision wouldn't be fair to the school districts that would lose out under the deal, since there wouldn't be any extra Title I money to offset their loss. The amendment failed on a vote of 22-16, despite Rep. Kline's support.

Democrats' Proposals

Democrats introduced two amendments, including one that would have replaced the accountability bill with their own version. The language, offered by Rep. Miller, would have required states to set their own achievement targets and expanded accountability for English-learners and students in special education, among other provisions. The amendment was defeated on a party-line vote.

Rep. Miller also put forth a replacement measure on the teacher bill. Mr. Miller's language would have kept in place the requirement that districts and states craft teacher-evaluation systems tied to student outcomes. And it would have included an authorization for funding for such programs as not pre-K American history, and the arts. That also went down on a party-line vote.

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Growing Gaps Bring Focus on Poverty's Role in Schooling

Education Week

By: Lesli A. Maxwell

March 7, 2012

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/07/23poverty_ep.h31.html?tkn=WWXFMgcjLy9fDakawletmEPhz4J5jDylqvwD&cmp=clp-edweek

The fractious debate over how much schools can counteract poverty's impact on children is far from settled, but a recently published collection of research strongly suggests that until policymakers and educators confront deepening economic and social disparities, poor children will increasingly miss out on finding a path to upward social mobility.

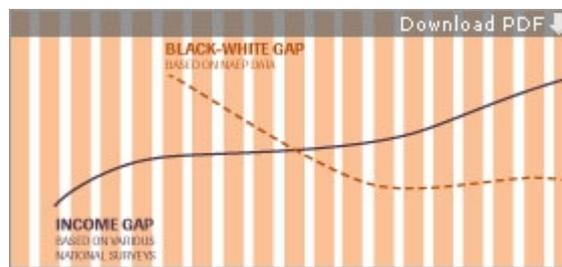
The achievement gap between poor children and rich children has grown significantly over the past three decades and is now nearly twice as large as the black-white gap, according to Sean F. Reardon, a Stanford University sociologist. He [examined data](#) on family income and student scores on standardized tests in reading and math spanning 1960 to 2007.

As the income gap has grown, so too has the disparity in how much money and time affluent parents invest in the development of their young children compared with such efforts by low-income parents. For example, between birth and age 6, children from high-income families now spend an average of 1,300 more hours in "novel" places outside their homes, schools, and day-care centers than children from poor families, a trend documented by Meredith Phillips, an associate professor of public policy and sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The findings by Mr. Reardon, Ms. Phillips, and others appear in [Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances](#), a volume of research published last fall by the New York City-based Russell Sage Foundation and the Spencer Foundation of Chicago that examines income inequality. The book illuminates, in multiple ways, how widening gaps in economic and social resources between rich and poor children over the past few decades have eroded public schools' ability to overcome those disadvantages.

Comparing Achievement Gaps in Reading

The achievement gap has widened sharply between rich and poor students in the past three decades and is now twice that of the gap between black and white students.



SOURCE: *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chance*

Just how the new findings might influence the ongoing debate in education policy circles around how much poverty matters is not yet clear. They build on years of research showing that family income and other factors linked to children's socioeconomic resources are the biggest predictor of students' educational attainment.

Yet they also come as many education policymakers, philanthropic funders of school reform, and influential leaders, such as former District of Columbia schools chief Michelle A. Rhee, have zeroed in on promoting efforts to make teachers and schools good enough to transcend poor children's difficult circumstances.

"It's true that there are schools that can make a difference even when family circumstances are extraordinarily difficult," said Richard J. Murnane, a professor of education and society in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who co-edited the new volume with Greg J. Duncan, an education professor at the University of California, Irvine. "But upward mobility through the mechanism of a good education, which is a widely held value in this country that cuts across the political spectrum, is in serious jeopardy," Mr. Murnane added.

'No Excuses'?

The debate around the relationship between poverty and success in school—which has played out in scholarly forums and on the front lines of education for decades—gained fresh intensity in the era of school accountability that began with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act a decade ago.

To some observers, the debate became more polarized in 2008 with the emergence of two distinct, though sometimes overlapping, "camps" emphasizing different policy prescriptions.

One group, known as the ["Broader, Bolder Approach to Education."](#) issued a manifesto calling for an expansive view of education policy that says schools alone can't erase the effects of poverty and should be treated as one part of a bigger strategy to address health, housing, parenting, and out-of-school time, among other issues, to improve outcomes for students.

A diverse group of scholars and educators, such as former Boston Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant, Stanford University scholar Linda Darling-Hammond, and then-Chicago schools chief Arne Duncan, signed the manifesto.

The other group, known as the [Education Equality Project](#) and often referred to as the "no excuses" camp, called for adopting measures that would dramatically change the teaching profession through performance pay, an end to tenure, and creation of more-rigorous evaluations that would hold teachers accountable for their students' performance. Ms. Rhee and former New York City Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein—backed by civil rights leaders such as the Rev. Al Sharpton—were among the signatories. Mr. Duncan also signed on to Education Equality's manifesto before being named U.S. secretary of education.

Andrés A. Alonso, the superintendent of schools in Baltimore since 2007, is often grouped with the no-excuses viewpoint for many of the changes he has brought to the struggling school system, such as closing schools and replacing low-performing principals and teachers. But he, like Mr. Duncan, endorsed both manifestos, and he credits efforts in Baltimore to increase preschool participation and address chronic absenteeism as among "the most productive part of our work here."

"It's been so unproductive to somehow pit competing theories of what accounts for failures of schools," Mr. Alonso said. "To say that poverty doesn't matter is something that teachers and people in schools feel trivializes their reality. You potentially sacrifice credibility to not say that poverty matters at the same time that you must assert that [poverty] should not determine what schools do in response."

Ms. Rhee, now the founder and chief executive officer of StudentsFirst, a national education advocacy group based in Sacramento, Calif., agrees that educators can't ignore the circumstances students come from. She cites efforts she made during her three years as chancellor in Washington to provide "wraparound" services and supports to students, such as placing guidance counselors, parent coordinators, and mentors for troubled children in every school. But those tactics do not rival the positive influence of a great teacher, she said.

"What often happens when we start to talk about wraparound services is a lot of people start to give up responsibility," Ms. Rhee said. "Even if you don't have wraparound services, the research shows that highly effective teachers can make a huge difference."

Closer Look at Income

When Mr. Reardon of Stanford set out to look at the relationship between rising income inequality and student achievement, he did not expect to see such a stark divide between rich and poor children, he said.

He examined standardized-test scores for reading and mathematics dating back to 1960 and ending in 2007 from several large national studies, such as the National Education Longitudinal Study. He then compared children from families in the 90th percentile of income—roughly \$160,000 in 2008—with those in the 10th percentile—around \$17,500 the same year—and found that over the past 30 years, the achievement gap between the two groups had grown by 40 percent.

"I was surprised by the magnitude," Mr. Reardon said. The growth in the income-based achievement gap also looked similar within racial groups, he said.

"A 90th percentile family makes 10 times the income now that a 10th percentile family does," Mr. Reardon said. "And the way these affluent parents raise their children has shifted dramatically. They believe their job as a parent is to organize their kids' lives around cognitive stimulation."

That's why making early-childhood education a bigger priority within efforts to improve public schooling makes sense, he said.

"Even if you do think schools can overcome most of this," Mr. Reardon said, "why would you want kids to go through the first six years of their lives under these circumstances and enter kindergarten with these huge disparities?"

Indeed, there is growing momentum nationally and at the state level for expanding and improving early-childhood-education programs, according to experts.

The federal Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge is providing \$500 million for nine states to share as they pursue efforts to increase the quality of early-childhood programs for low-income children, and stringent new rules for Head Start services are designed to increase the quality of the federally funded preschool program for poor children.

Wraparound Services

While most of the current policy initiatives at the federal and state levels still focus largely on accountability and raising standards for students and teachers, efforts that include tactics for improving the environments children live in—known as wraparound services—are expanding.

Some of them, like the Harlem Children's Zone in New York, through which families receive a broad array of free services in addition to their children's enrollment in a charter school, are not new. The decades-old "community schools" model, which brings nonprofit partners into schools to help educators address a range of issues stemming from poverty, is also inspiring more recent efforts.

Among the current initiatives:

- The U.S. Department of Education's "[Promise Neighborhoods](#)" has awarded this fiscal year more than \$20 million in grants to five communities to create schools that pair education with health and other services for families.
- A [five-year project](#) in McDowell County, W.Va., begun late last year and spearheaded by the American Federation of Teachers, seeks to simultaneously improve schooling and address problems brought about by the deep economic troubles in that area. It features partnerships with nonprofit groups, corporations, higher education, and government agencies to expand access to medical and dental services, improve drug-abuse-prevention and -treatment programs, and provide more opportunities for recreation and enrichment for children.
- An [effort](#) begun last summer by Oakland, Calif., schools Superintendent Tony Smith aims to make every city school a "community hub," where partners provide services to counteract poverty's effects. Goals include vaccinating children before kindergarten, eliminating disparities in how students of different races are disciplined, and boosting school attendance. "More and more leaders are saying that it's their obligation and moral responsibility to help address these problems," said Martin J. Blank, the director of the Washington-based Coalition for Community Schools, "and that it's really at the core of their academic mission."

Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation in Washington, is a leading proponent of policies that seek to break up large concentrations of poverty in individual schools. He hopes the *Whither Opportunity?* volume of research on poverty and schooling will spur greater will to try solutions, such as new school assignment policies, that have proved politically difficult in the past.

Specifically, he favors efforts that seek to mix children from high-, middle-, and low-income families in schools. He cited results from the 4th grade math portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress that showed poor children who attended more-affluent schools were "two years ahead of their peers in high-poverty schools."

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STATE NEWS

North Carolina: Teacher performance pay is off state agenda

News Observer

By: Lynn Bonner and Rob Christensen

March 7, 2012

<http://www.newsobserver.com/2012/03/07/1910846/teacher-performance-pay-is-off.html>

BY LYNN BONNER AND ROB CHRISTENSEN

A legislative education committee won't include performance pay for teachers in its recommendations for short-session laws, one chairman said.

Performance pay for state employees, including teachers, was one of the big ideas included in the GOP-crafted budget last year. The budget included \$121 million to spend in 2012-2013 on "labor market and equity salary increases" and performance-based pay plans.

Setting up a performance pay system is extremely complicated, said Rep. Brian Holloway, a Stokes County Republican and co-chairman of the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. "I highly doubt performance pay will take place in the short session," he said.

The meeting featured ideas from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, with interim Superintendent Hugh Hattabaugh and board Chairwoman Ericka Ellis-Stewart talking about the district's performance pay and teacher evaluation plan, and representatives from the mostly privately funded Project L.I.F.T. talking about their work with the district's lowest-performing schools.

Major fundraising by Dems

Some major bucks were paid out last week at the fundraisers attended by first lady Michelle Obama in North Carolina.

The top price was \$100,000 per couple at The Ballantyne hotel in Charlotte to benefit the Democratic National Convention, reports Lynn Sweet of the Chicago Sun-Times. That included dinner, a performance by singer James Taylor, and a photo with

the first lady and something called "a couple greet." If you gave \$50,000, you got basically the same thing without the couple greet. For \$12,500, a couple got into the dinner, but no photograph and no greeting.

Earlier in the evening at the same hotel, a person could attend a reception with the first lady and Taylor. The cost was \$2,500 for platinum seating, which included cuff links or bracelets with the convention logo, \$1,000 for gold seating, and \$250 for the cheap seats.

At the N.C. Women for Obama reception at the downtown Marriott in Raleigh, the basic price was \$500. But for \$5,000, a person could become a table captain (10 tickets and a photo reception), or for \$35,800 become a co-chair.

State revenue rises

The state's general fund revenue was \$145 million above target in January, Fiscal Research Division economist Barry Boardman told legislators Tuesday.

Personal income tax collections are the main reason revenues are beating the target, he said. Those are up 3.9 percent. At this time last year, they were up 1.2 percent, Boardman reported.

Business taxes are 3.1 percent above target.

Five months of "solid" economic data reports say the economy is gaining strength, Boardman said. But potential trouble looms in rising commodity prices, slow employment growth, potential recessions in Europe and Japan, and the still-struggling housing market.

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Minnesota: DFL is stuck in the mud of teacher seniority

Star Tribune

By: Lynnell Mickelsen

March 6, 2012

<http://www.startribune.com/opinion/commentaries/141673773.html>

So there I was, in late February, a lifelong, die-hard progressive DFL mom from Minneapolis, sitting in the governor's office with Rep. Branden Petersen, a die-hard conservative Republican dad from Coon Rapids.

We were there to see if Gov. Mark Dayton would consider signing Petersen's bill to get rid of "last in, first out" (LIFO), a law that forces school districts to make teacher layoffs based solely on seniority, instead of effectiveness.

Branden and I are unlikely political allies who don't agree on much except that every kid deserves the best possible teacher and that LIFO is really stupid. According to a recent poll, 91 percent of Minnesotans agree.

So you'd think his LIFO bill would be a bipartisan no-brainer. But this is the State Capitol, so, alas, no.

Our small meeting started off with the governor's deputy chief of staff, Michelle Kelm Helgen, saying that LIFO is not a problem because -- listen up, people, great news -- ineffective teachers in Minnesota are routinely removed from the classroom within two or three months.

So by the time layoffs are announced in April, she went on, there aren't many ineffective teachers left. They've already been removed. Which is why our seniority rules work just fine.

As God as my witness, she actually said this. I started to reply that this rosy scenario had not been my experience in Minneapolis.

But the governor cut me off, saying that Minneapolis schools were not relevant to this discussion because the district was an abomination, a sea of dysfunction; its school board couldn't even negotiate a decent contract; it was not like the rest of the state. It was an abomination, he repeated.

Which I thought was a bit too biblical. Yes, we have problems, but I didn't think we were at Book of Revelation levels.

As I type this, I'm thinking the governor may have meant "aberration," and as a fellow boomer who experiences frequent Noun Failure (my husband and I are reduced to pointing at objects and saying "that thingy thing there") he has my total support.

Anyhow, the rest of the meeting followed the usual talking points of my beloved DFL tribe. We were told there's no proven way to know which teachers are effective; that student academic growth data isn't reliable; that the state would need many years to design and test evaluations before it could even consider using them in layoffs; that teachers were feeling demoralized and besieged, ditto for unions, etc., etc.

"Besides, what's the hurry?" asked the governor. "If it's such a good idea, why not introduce it next session?"

Have I mentioned yet that GOP legislators mostly drive me nuts? That I hate their creepy obsessions with gays, guns, voter ID, various lady parts, right-to-work nonsense and tax breaks for overpaid CEOs? That I fervently hope the DFL retakes the state Legislature this November?

But that brings me to what the hurry is: If the DFL regains control of the Legislature, we can kiss most education reforms goodbye. Because, on this topic, my party acts like a wholly owned subsidiary of Education Minnesota, which, frankly, doesn't do much for our credibility with ordinary voters.

That's why, as a Democrat, I really hope that Dayton signs the bill. He came into office beholden to no one.

Unlike the legislators, he's not on the ballot this November. So he's in the unique position to lead and do the right thing for the 800,000 public school kids in this state. Which may actually help the DFL in November.

If he vetoes it, voters will hear, once again, that if the DFL has to choose between a kid's right to a great teacher and an ineffective teacher's right to a job, we'll side with the ineffective teacher. This does not strike me as a winning party platform.

In fact, I'm beginning to think that teacher seniority rights are to the DFL what gay marriage is to the GOP. Republicans keep banging their Bibles and thundering that marriage is between a man and a woman.

But they are losing this culture war. The public -- especially people under 30 -- increasingly accepts gay marriage, and we're not going backward on this issue.

The same thing goes with teacher seniority rights. The DFL can keep insisting that rigid seniority works great, that teachers -- unlike any other profession -- can't be fairly evaluated or hired or laid off based on their performance.

But the public doesn't buy it. Many young teachers are also asking for change.

As Democrats, the more we defend these rules, the dumber we look.

Lynnell Mickelsen is in her 18th year as a Minneapolis public school parent and is the cofounder of Put Kids First Minneapolis, a volunteer progressive group pushing for changes in the teachers' contract.

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Principal evaluation differences slows West Virginia bill

Associated Press

By: Staff

March 6, 2012

http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2012/03/06/504751wvxgrteacherevaluations_ap.html

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — The House and Senate differ over how to evaluate principals and school administrators as legislators work to draft a compromise educator evaluation bill.

A group of lawmakers will meet to work out differences in the bill, which would require all teachers to have annual performance evaluations. Five percent of a teacher's evaluation would be based on standardized test scores and 15 percent would be based on students' growth from the beginning of the school year to the end of the year. Teachers would also have the ability to present evidence to their principals documenting that student growth.

The House version would apply the same student performance measures to administrators but the Senate version would not. Both would evaluate principals and assistant principals on leadership standards and stakeholder surveys.

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CHIEFS FOR CHANGE IN THE NEWS

Louisiana Superintendent of Education White: Voucher program will draw few at first

Associated Press

By: Staff

March 6, 2012

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/06/504824lxgrschoolvouchers_ap.html

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — If lawmakers approve a statewide program enabling some low-income families to send their kids to private schools at public expense, Louisiana's education superintendent expects it to start small.

Gov. Bobby Jindal has proposed expanding a voucher program already in place in New Orleans. It allows lower income families with kids in failing public schools to send those children to approved private schools using taxpayer dollars.

An estimated 380,000 students would be eligible if the Legislature goes along with Jindal's proposal. However, Superintendent of Education John White, a strong backer of the plan, said Tuesday that he expects enrollment would likely be around 2,000 when the program expansion begins, based on other states' experience with similar programs.

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