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NATIONAL NEWS

Obama Administration Concerned With Harkin-Enzi Accountability

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

October 21, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/10/obama_administration_unhappy_w.html

Sounds like the Obama administration is less than thrilled with the accountability provisions in the ESEA-reauthorization bill passed out of the Senate education committee yesterday.

No press release or anything, but earlier this week, the Education Department quietly updated its blog to reflect that they would like to see stronger accountability provisions in the rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Here's a snippet:

"Increased flexibility at the state and local level is consistent with the administration's policy on waivers and our Blueprint for Reform. However, it is equally important that we maintain a strong commitment to accountability for the success of all students, and I am concerned that the Senate bill does not go far enough. Parents, teachers, and state leaders across the country understand that in order to prepare all of our young people to compete in the global economy, we must hold ourselves and each other accountable at every level of the education system- from the classroom to the school district, from the states to the federal government."

Check out the whole post [here](#).

Their concern is not a surprise, of course, given that the [waiver plan](#) the administration put forward retains something closer to the current system of adequate yearly progress than the Harkin-Enzi bill would.

The administration sent a statement to reporters on Oct. 17 citing concerns with the [changes](#) to teacher evaluation in the measure. But that statement didn't specifically cite accountability as a concern, even though a lot of business groups, state chiefs, and civil rights advocates are [unhappy](#) with the measure.

Also, interestingly, the administration put out a supportive statement when the bill was [introduced](#), but they didn't send anything similar to reporters after it was passed.

Of course, the bill didn't change too much during markup. In fact, the most substantial change during committee consideration was an amendment by Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., which would allow states to come up with their own plans for turning around the lowest performing schools. And that can't be something the Obama administration, which crafted the current models, is particularly happy about.

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In College, Working Hard to Learn High School Material

Education Week

By: Michael Winerip

October 23, 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/24/education/24winerip.html?_r=2&ref=education

In June, Desiree Smith was graduated from [Murry Bergtraum High](#). Her grades were in the 90s, she said, and she had passed the four state Regents exams. Since enrolling last month at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, Ms. Smith, 19, has come to realize that graduating from a New York City public high school is not the same as learning.

She failed all three placement tests for LaGuardia and is now taking remediation in reading, writing and math. So are Nikita Thomas, of [Bedford Stuyvesant Prep](#); Sade Washington, of the [Young Women's Leadership School](#) in East Harlem; Stacey Sumulong, of [Queens Vocational and Technical](#); Lucrecia Woolford of [John Adams High](#); and Juan Rodriguez of [Grover Cleveland High](#). "Passing the Regents don't mean nothing," Ms. Thomas said. "The main focus in high school is to get you to graduate; it makes the school look good. They get you in and get you out."

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has made the rising graduation rate — to 61 percent in June, from 46.5 percent in 2005 — the No. 1 symbol of his educational accomplishments. But that rate is less impressive when paired with the percentage of graduates who need remediation in all three subjects when they enter LaGuardia or other [City University of New York community colleges](#): 22.6 percent in 2010 (2,812 students), up from 15.4 percent in 2005 (1,085).

"A few years ago, we noticed the numbers really jump," said John Mogulescu, the senior university dean for CUNY. Over all, 74 percent of city high school graduates enrolled at the system's six community colleges take remediation in at least one subject, but those needing all three are at the highest risk of dropping out. So in 2008, CUNY started a program with a few dozen students to see if an intensive semester focused on just the three subjects — five hours a day, five days a week — could make a difference. [The program, known as Start](#), has since expanded.

Of the 302 enrolled so far, 241 stayed the entire semester, 159 of whom were able to pass all three remediation tests. This semester, the plan was to have 630 Start students at the six campuses, but there was such demand, more than 700 were accepted.

A major attraction is cost. Full-time students at LaGuardia pay \$1,800 a semester; three remedial classes would dominate a schedule without counting toward graduation. Start costs \$75.

"The \$75 was big," said Ms. Smith, who has been working at a McDonald's since she was 14.

She and the others say that the Start courses go deeper than their high school classes did, and that teachers ask open-ended questions. "In math in high school if you got called on to answer a problem and gave no answer, the teacher moved on," said Pedro Vargas, a 2011 graduate of [Richmond Hill High](#) in Queens. "Here they keep asking, they want you to explore."

Most Start instructors do not have traditional academic backgrounds. Sarah Eisenstein, who teaches reading and writing, worked in adult education. One day last week she did a lesson on interpretation versus text-based evidence, using a short story by Nicholasa Mohr. She had numbered each of the 74 paragraphs beforehand, making it easier to cite and follow evidence.

Ms. Eisenstein does not feel obliged to talk when it gets quiet. "So they fill the silence," she said. "It takes a lot of practice." And while she works to prepare them for the tests, she does not do test prep. "For us, the depth is more important than the breadth."

Ms. Washington, 18, said that in high school, a lot of time was spent gaming the system. "The big thing they cared about was keeping the graduation rate up," she said. "Whatever they had to do to get you to graduate — if it means like a little trick to get you out, tell you to do this, do that and you're out."

[Shael Polakow-Suransky](#), the city's chief academic officer, said that standards had not been lowered to graduate more students, pointing out that since 2007 the state has added one Regents exam each year as a requirement to graduate. He also said part of the reason remediation had risen was that in 2008 CUNY raised the math score needed to pass the placement test.

But he also said, "We think the numbers are unacceptable."

Mr. Polakow-Suransky said that Regents tests should be overhauled because they drive the curriculum, yet do not measure what students need to know for college. Many of the students who require remediation are scoring between the 65 needed to pass and the 75 the state has set as the score to be college-ready. "The real solution is not to play around with the cut scores," he said. "It's to give kids more challenging, rich and authentic work."

Community colleges have their own reasons to create programs like Start. A recent study by Complete College America found that 13.9 percent of community college students get an associate's degree within three years. But for those who require remediation, the number drops to 9.5 percent. (CUNY's most recent three-year graduation rate was 15.5 percent.)

The Start program worked for Nathan Rambharose, who participated in 2009. He said the course gave him the tools to learn. His current grade-point average at LaGuardia is 3.2. His plan is to graduate this spring, go on to get a bachelor's degree, and eventually become an information-technology instructor in the public schools.

Mr. Rambharose goes to college at night, after working from 5 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in a bookstore at La Guardia Airport. One of the best things about the job, he said, is that when the store is empty, he can read the books. Recently he has finished "Three Cups of Tea," "A Thousand Splendid Suns" and "The Kite Runner."

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Different Measures of Effectiveness Shown to Be Complementary

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

October 19, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/10/different_measures_of_effectiv.html

Both a value-added teacher-effectiveness measure and a series of scored teacher observations bear a positive relationship to students' future academic achievement, according to a [recently published paper](#) in the journal *Labour Economics*.

In plain English, this means that when a teacher scored well on one measure of teaching ability, she also tended to score well on the other measure. That's encouraging news as states and districts go about the difficult task of designing evaluation systems that incorporate both kinds of information.

"The value-added information is useful information, but it's imperfect; the subjective complements it and makes us more certain in the overall evaluation," said Jonah E. Rockoff, one of the study's authors. "If someone is performing highly on both of these metrics, we can be more confident they're actually truly outstanding."

For the study, Rockoff and his co-author analyzed teacher-student data from New York City between 2003 and 2008. Using a value-added method, they looked at first-year teachers' performance in the classroom.

Then, they analyzed two forms of subjective, observation-based evaluations for these teachers:

- Information from teachers hired through the city's Teaching Fellows program, who were rated on a 5-point scale based on a mock teaching lesson and other criteria; and
- Information from a district mentoring program, where mentors would periodically observe and provide monthly feedback to the new teachers, also based on a 5-point scale.

The authors then looked to see how well the measures predicted teachers' future performance.

They found that both the observations and the test-score-based measures were correlated, or related; that both types picked up effectiveness information; and that that information was *complementary*; that is, they gauged different facets of teacher effectiveness.

The study also found that the effectiveness calculations became more precise when they were combined, which thereby "increases our confidence in each measure," the study states.

The findings also mean that, if someone scored well on one measure and not on the other, it could point to a problem in the evaluation. For instance, perhaps the teacher got lucky on test scores that year or had an evaluator that he didn't get along with. Essentially, the two forms of information can help serve as a check on each other.

The paper underscores the importance of using observations in addition to just value-added, because they can pick up on teaching skills not captured by test scores.

Obliquely, the paper also points out the crucial role of the training of observers.

When examining the scores the mentor teachers gave out, the authors found that some were generally more lenient graders than others. Future teacher performance wasn't related to teachers' average score; it was related to how teachers were scored *relative to other teachers scored by the same grader*.

Ideally, you want all raters to be trained to see the same thing when observing performance. This inter-rater consistency is something long-standing teacher-evaluation systems (like Cincinnati's or the TAP system) have underscored in their training.

"The lesson here is you do need to get the training right so the norming is right," Rockoff said.

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STATE NEWS

Responding to colleagues, three state Michigan Board of Education

members say it is 'time to embrace more parental choice'

Grand Rapids Press MLive.com

By: Dave Murray

October 22, 2011

http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2011/10/responding_to_colleagues_three.html

There's a deep divide on the state Board of Education over charter schools, with three members sending letters defending the schools a week after three colleagues cautioned lawmakers about plans to lift the cap on the public school academies.

"It is time to embrace more parental choice in education," wrote Republicans Nancy Danhoff of East Lansing, Eileen Wieser of Ann Arbor, and Richard Zelic of Detroit.

"We need great public schools of every stripe – traditional and charter. We support the elimination of the university-authorized charter school cap and encourage the Legislature to pass Senate Bill 618."

The letter was distributed after three Democratic board members – Marianne McGuire and Kathleen Straus of Detroit and Casandra Ulbrich of Rochester Hills, took an unusual step of issuing a statement critical of charter schools, lifting the cap on university authorized schools and the "parent trigger" that would allow failing schools to be converted to charters with a vote of parents and teachers.

The flurry came after the collective board could not agree on an open letter recommending changes to charter school legislation. Plans to lift the cap were approved by the full state Senate, and the parent trigger was approved by the Senate's Education Committee.

McGuire, at the board meeting, said the reform package would "open the floodgates" for charters and would "be the death knell for public education, which is something to revere in this country."

Danhof, Weiser and Zeile wrote that they wanted to correct "erroneous information" being published about charter schools.

"In an apples-to-apples comparison, charter schools outperform traditional public schools on the MEAP by 10 to 15 percent in our largest urban areas including Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing and Flint."

The state Education Department reported that only 33 percent of Detroit Public Schools met "adequate yearly progress" testing goals last year, compared to 70 percent of Detroit's charter schools, the letter reads.

"And MEAP research shows that students enrolled at the same charter school for three years meet or beat the statewide average in math and reading.

"The same is true for graduation rates. A disproportionately large percentage of charter school students enroll in at-risk high schools and strict discipline academies after they fail to succeed in traditional public schools. When that is factored in, the charter high school graduation rate compares favorably to the state's average graduation rate."

The members said charter schools are held to the same standards of accountability as traditional public schools.

"However, they are far more accountable for their performance. Public charter schools have to answer to an authorizing body – a public institution that provides guidance, monitoring and oversight. When charter schools fail, they're closed down.

"Authorizers have closed over 50 under-performing charter schools over the last 17 years. Not a single poor-performing traditional public school has been closed in that time. That means that students from closed charters returned to the same low-achieving traditional schools from which they had hoped to escape."

The three wrote that innovation in charter schools "takes many forms."

"For some children, it's simply knowing they are finally in a safe learning environment. For others, it's the chance to frame all learning in a school focused on the basics, or centered on a special academic area, or to learn in a culture that believes that every child deserves a second chance. It's important to note that charter schools receive on average about \$1,400 less per student than their neighboring traditional public schools. They are working to do a great job with less.

"In Detroit, students at The Jalen Rose Leadership Academy attend class 211 days a year as they work to prepare for a successful future. The West Michigan Aviation Academy in Grand Rapids is located at an airport, where students can get an amazing head start on a career in the skies. Brighton's FlexTech High School fits education to each student, which is perfect for anyone - from students working during the day to support their families, to elite athletes needing flexibility for competition.

"And in Holland, Black River Public School has earned the attention of the Washington Post. Using a statistical matrix that looks at how well schools prepare their students for college, they ranked it as the top public high school in the state."

Democrats control the eight-member board, with President John Austin, D-Ann Arbor, and Daniel Varner, D-Detroit, not signing on to either side's letters.

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D.C. Council Chairman Brown looks at multiple incentives to steer highly effective teachers to weak schools

Washington Post

By: Bill Turque

October 21, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/dc-schools-insider/post/brown-looks-at-multiple-incentives-to-steer-highly-effective-teachers-to-weak-schools/2011/10/21/gIQAFOP23L_blog.html

D.C. Council Chairman Kwame R. Brown called this afternoon to say that the bill he is drafting to steer [good teachers to struggling schools](#) involves more than possibly waiving annual evaluations.

Brown says he is looking closely at incentives other states have established, including homebuying assistance, tax credits and

loan repayments. He wants to pilot the effort in the city's middle schools.

"That's the gist of the legislation," Brown said.

Illinois, for example, offers low-interest loans for down payments in the school districts where teachers work. California assumes portions of student loan payments for educators willing to go into low-income or rural schools. Maryland takes on as much as \$11,000 in debt for four years of service. New York reimburses tuition for instructors seeking certification to teach science or math in a low-performing school.

I haven't had a chance yet to look for evidence that these measures actually work. Some seem relatively new, so it may be hard to tell.

There are some significant hurdles facing District legislation. Housing incentives would have to be significant to lure some of the many teachers who live in Maryland or Virginia across state lines. Temporarily exempting teachers from evaluations may also be problematic. Public charter schools don't use a uniform evaluation system such as IMPACT, so some equivalent measure of teacher quality would have to be developed.

Changes in IMPACT might be the most politically problematic. Private donors who have committed tens of millions of dollars to DCPS might not look favorably on any move that appeared to weaken IMPACT's reach. Any modifications would also require the agreement of Chancellor Kaya Henderson, which is far from a sure thing. Brown said Henderson sent positive signals in their discussion, but she offered a more nuanced reaction in a lengthy e-mail this morning.

While Henderson said she's willing to explore the issue, she remains strongly committed to the idea of "mutual consent" in dealings with teachers, meaning that any job assignment should be contingent on agreement by both the teacher and school principal.

"I strongly believe in treating teachers as professional adults, not widgets that we move around at will," she said. "I think we need to ASK our high performing teachers what would make them consider teaching in a low-performing school, and what's holding them back. Only after considering their input should we develop a plan to address this issue."

Henderson said evaluations are "a critical component" to helping teachers succeed in the classroom. "Without them, teachers don't always get the critical feedback that they need to improve and refine their practice to ensure that they are doing their very best for our students. Even highly effective teachers want and need feedback," Henderson said.

"These are complex issues, which require sophisticated solutions," she said, adding that it will be important to look carefully at other incentive programs "so we don't make the same assumptions or fall into the same traps as districts who have tried this before, and failed."

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Florida: New era of teacher evaluations commences in Manatee County

Bradenton Herald

By: Sarah Butrymowicz and Angeline Taylor

October 23, 2011

<http://www.bradenton.com/2011/10/23/3590337/new-era-of-teacher-evaluations.html#ixzz1bhdofEGW>

MANATEE -- About 70 percent of Principal Doug DuPouy's teachers at Orange Ridge/Bullock Elementary School spent an entire year in the classroom without being formally observed by an administrator.

Now that's changed.

Starting this year, DuPouy or Assistant Principal Greg Sanders will formally observe each teacher in his or her classroom at least once a year, all as part of Manatee County School District's revamped teacher-evaluation system.

As they watch, the administrators will fill out worksheets, scoring teachers on things like classroom management and teaching strategies. They'll also rate instructors on how well they accomplish two goals set at the beginning of the year, such as working to make sure students have a better understanding of a specific math standard.

In the first three years of their careers, teachers will be observed twice a year. Those with more experience will be observed once annually in formal, pre-announced classroom visits. Administrators also will perform two seven- to 10-minute walk-throughs of each classroom, where they drop by without warning.

By 2014, the evaluation scores will influence district personnel decisions, from how much teachers earn to who gets let go.

District and union officials are lauding the new system as a huge step forward, but it hasn't been universally embraced by teachers.

"Almost everyone is concerned about the (evaluation) process itself," said Roz Steward, a first-grade teacher at Bradenton's Miller Elementary.

As a result of recent legislation, all Florida school districts will have to redo their evaluation systems by 2014, basing 50 percent of each teacher's evaluation on a complex value-added formula that looks at students' standardized test scores. Districts will decide individually on the components for the other 50 percent of their evaluation scores. For now, Manatee will keep its current evaluation system, which allows district officials to tweak the program as they go along.

Teacher-evaluation systems are being refined throughout the country and the stakes attached to them are rising. In Tennessee -- the first state to roll out a new evaluation system paid for in part by Race to the Top funds -- changes have been criticized by teachers. Many there have opted for early retirement rather than be evaluated under the new system.

Principal DuPouy, who served on the district committee to overhaul the evaluation system, sees the changes as largely positive.

"It's a chance for us to give (teachers) feedback," he said. "That's very valuable for teachers. Better teaching is going to lead to better student achievement."

Teacher-evaluation systems have come under scrutiny across the nation, in part because of "The Widget Effect," a 2009 report by The New Teacher Project that found less than 1 percent of teachers received "unsatisfactory" ratings in the 12 districts studied.

The report's authors concluded that in most U.S. school districts, "excellent teachers cannot be recognized or rewarded, chronically low-performing teachers languish, and the wide majority of teachers performing at moderate levels do not get the differentiated support and development they need to improve as professionals."

At the same time, there's a growing consensus that teacher effectiveness is the most important in-school factor in student achievement. Unions and reformers also now generally agree that new evaluation systems should be based on multiple measures of a teacher's performance -- not just student test scores or "drive-by" observation of his or her classroom.

In the past, Manatee teachers were evaluated once a year up to their third year and only on two professional development goals. The district has opted not to renew the contracts of at least 50 teachers based on performance in recent years, estimated Superintendent Tim McGonegal.

That may change going forward. Under the new state-mandated system, any teacher rated as unsatisfactory for two consecutive years -- or in need of improvement for three years in a row -- will be fired. Teachers who land in the other two categories, effective and highly effective, will get salary bumps.

Steward, who also served on the district committee to create the new system, said teachers are mostly coming to her seeking clarity about the process involved in the new evaluation system.

"Teachers are just working their way into getting comfortable with the observations," Steward said. "Seasoned teachers have not had that experience for a while."

Tim Daly, president of The New Teacher Project, recommends several observations throughout the school year as a way to lessen anxiety and build a more reliable picture of a teacher's performance.

"If you only do one observation, you're putting an awful lot of pressure on that interaction to be done well," he said. "I think very few districts will go in that direction because to see a teacher perform one lesson out of 180 days of school ... is a small snapshot. You're extrapolating quite a lot from that."

Kathy Hebda, deputy chancellor in the Florida Department of Education, echoed that sentiment. Although she said she recognized that in some cases it could take years to change current evaluation systems, one classroom observation "is not enough ultimately."

Patricia Dillman, assistant principal at Haile Middle School who also serves on the district committee that overhauled the evaluation system, stressed that the new requirements were just minimums. At her school, the administration hopes to be able to do multiple observations of all teachers each year.

Still, it comes down to issues of time and money. With the help of a grant, Manatee's neighbor to the north, Hillsborough County, is reworking its evaluation system to include multiple observations by different educators, including principals and other teachers.

"We would love to be able to do something like that," McGonegal said. "But the district doesn't have the money to fund more evaluators."

-- The Hechinger Report is an independently funded unit of Teachers College at Columbia University.

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Some Arizona A-plus schools get C in new

Associated Press

By: Staff

October 22, 2011

http://azdailysun.com/news/state-and-regional/some-arizona-a-plus-schools-get-c-in-new-grading/article_d20367d2-fe1f-54eb-b159-fa3c5d095b73.html#ixzz1bhebzBbj

Seven of the 62 A-plus public schools recognized by the Arizona Educational Foundation as outstanding in the past three years received C's in the state's new performance-grading system.

The A-plus School of Excellence Award is based more on a comprehensive look at a school and the new letter grades are based on test scores and how well students have progressed on those scores.

The Arizona Republic (<http://bit.ly/mTQceo>) reported Saturday that an Arizona Educational Foundation committee will meet soon to discuss how the grades might fit into the A-plus application process in the future.

"This is a transition year for us, and we'll have to see once the dust settles," said Bobbie O'Boyle, the foundation's executive director.

She added that it's likely the foundation will probably allow only A and B schools to receive the A-plus award.

"I know they will have explanations for their C's," O'Boyle said. "Their test scores may not reflect that (A-plus recognition), but hopefully they're moving in the right direction and next year they'll get a better grade."

The non-profit Arizona Educational Foundation has been handing out its A-plus awards since it was established in 1983. Schools must meet a number of criteria before receiving the award, which a school keeps for three years before it must seek it again.

The Arizona Department of Education started handing out its letter grades last week to better explain a school's performance over the old labeling system, which gave schools six labels from "excelling" to "failing."

Although seven of the 62 A-plus schools received C's from the state, 21 others received B's and 32 received A's. One A-plus school, Desert Arroyo Middle School in Cave Creek, closed in 2010.

A-plus schools that received a C and the district each is located in are: Barry Goldwater High and Poseo Elementary, Deer Valley Unified; Granada East, Alhambra Elementary School District; Sanborn Elementary, Chandler Unified; Excelencia Elementary, Creighton Elementary School District; Sopori Elementary, Sahuarita Unified; and Los Amigos Elementary, Sunnyside Unified in Tucson.

The East Valley Institute of Technology, which received its A-plus recognition this year, does not get a letter grade from the state because it doesn't offer standardized testing.

Barry Goldwater High Principal Mike Andersen said one of the main reasons his school received a C is because it serves about a dozen group homes and shelters. He said many of these students drop out, hurting its graduation numbers.

Granada East Elementary Principal Sandy Kennedy said it was a "huge disappointment" to get a C, especially since the school missed a B by a half a point.

The school is in a high-needs area in central-west Phoenix and 95 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch, she added.

"We welcome accountability," Kennedy said. "We will develop a plan and make it our job to improve."

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