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NATIONAL NEWS

STEM education gaining steam

Washington Post

By: Robert Samuels

October 24, **2011**

http://www.washingtonpost.com/stem-education-gaining-steam/2011/10/24/gIQAFJQsCM_story.html

I recently had a fascinating conversation with a curator at the National Museum of American History named Peggy Kidwell about [math education and the tools that are used to enhance it](#). Kidwell has an unusual specialty: she collects math tools that have been used in classrooms (Sliderules! Calculators! Protractors!) over the years and learns why they became so popular. According to the Kidwell, one of the big reasons driving the popularity of tools is a federal declaration that the United States needs to pick up the pace in a particular field (Think of how Sputnik and the space race accelerated math/science education).

Which leads to STEM. STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education. President Obama has said that students must be inspired to be more innovative and [declared that STEM education should be a priority](#), particularly for minority students. So now comes a deluge of events throughout Maryland. A sampling from this month alone: [A former astronaut meeting](#) with 2,500 Prince George's students; the start of a [climate, ocean and weather program at Drew-Freeman Middle School](#); a middle school conference was held at the [United States Naval Academy to get girls interested in the science field](#).

"Right now, our nation is on a race for discovery and new knowledge, a race to remain competitive and to foster an innovation society. At the heart of this race is education," Sen.Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) said at the inauguration of the ocean and weather program at Drew-Freeman. "I am glad to see the funds I put in the federal checkbook for science, engineering, technology, and mathematics education at the National Science Foundation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in action. I am so proud of the students and faculty at Drew-Freeman Middle School who are making Prince George's County a national hub of science and technology with students ready to fill the jobs of tomorrow."

Of course, this movement goes beyond Maryland. In Florida, [there's been some controversy over](#) what exactly counts as a STEM subject, as the St. Petersburg Times-Miami Herald's Politifact Florida has reported.

But there is little doubt that one of the key features of STEM education is hands-on learning. White coats, video game joysticks and computer simulations are but a few of tools that we're seeing pop-up in this movement. One of our [Virginia Schools' insiders](#). Kevin Sieff, wrote a story a few months ago about STEM education with my favorite building block, [the Lego](#).

What were some of your favorite math tools growing up? And what STEM projects are you seeing at your schools?

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Common Core Accelerates Interest in Online Professional Development

Education Week

By: Katie Ash

October 24, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/26/09edtech-commoncore.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/26/09edtech-commoncore.h31.html?tkn=TNOF02KxwpEO7sTckCdFC0gDxeNCL6RQs3FH&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-PD1011-EWH)

[tkn=TNOF02KxwpEO7sTckCdFC0gDxeNCL6RQs3FH&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-PD1011-EWH](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/26/09edtech-commoncore.h31.html?tkn=TNOF02KxwpEO7sTckCdFC0gDxeNCL6RQs3FH&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-PD1011-EWH)

Educators plan to share resources across state and district lines

Now that all but five states have adopted the common-core state standards, education leaders are working to create and distribute high-quality professional development to guide teachers through the transition.

Those leaders cite the Internet as a powerful tool for sharing resources and materials across state and district lines.

"We've always had the ability to share resources, but now those resources are aligned with the same student expectations," said Greta Bornemann, the project director for the implementation of the common standards for the office of public instruction in Washington state. "Especially during the fiscal crisis that we're in, we can really tap into the power of working together [as a nation] around professional development."

But many states have not begun to take the essential steps toward putting in place the work of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, including providing face-to-face or online professional development for teachers and other education stakeholders, according to a [survey](#) released in September by the Washington-based [Center on Education Policy](#).

In fact, more than half the 315 districts surveyed indicated they had not provided professional development for teachers of mathematics or English/language arts—the two common-core subject areas—and were not planning to provide PD for implementing common core for those teachers during the 2011-12 school year.

Inadequate funding and a lack of state guidance on the new standards were cited as two top challenges in their implementation, the survey found.

Regardless, professional development is critical to the overall success of the common standards, said Timothy Kanold, the past president of the [National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics](#), a Denver-based leadership network that provides professional development for math teachers.

"To help the stakeholders—teachers, counselors, administrators, paraprofessionals—in order for them to be confident in the common core and teaching deeper into the standards, they need meaningful and supportive professional development," he said. For most states, shifting to the common standards will require a shift in instruction.

"There are only 28 standards [for math], which is fewer standards than ever before, but you now have to teach them and drill much deeper into them," Mr. Kanold said. "Students are expected to conjecture and reason and problem-solve. That's a new day in math. That's a shift for everyone; therefore, we have real professional development that needs to get done."

And PD should not be confined to a one-time conference or class, said Mr. Kanold, but rather become an ongoing process for teachers.

Online professional development, in particular, may help teachers embed those PD opportunities into their daily schedules more naturally because it is so easily accessed, he said.

"It's instantaneous," said Mr. Kanold. "I don't have to wait for the conference."

Evaluating Quality

Tanya Baker, the director of national programs for the National Writing Project, the Berkeley, Calif.-based nonprofit organization with multiple sites throughout the country that provides resources and professional development to writing teachers, said the writing portion of the standards also represents a shift to a richer and more rigorous understanding of writing.

"Teachers with a significant amount of experience might not have very much experience with the kind of teaching that would lead kids to be successful with these standards," she said.

And although the common standards provide an opportunity to share resources between states, education leaders need to keep in mind that all teachers will come to those resources and professional-development opportunities with different backgrounds.

"My worry about online professional development around common-core standards is that it'll be one-size-fits-all," Ms. Baker said.

"Even as we're thinking nationally, we need to be aware locally" of teachers' specific backgrounds and instructional methods.

Another issue for online PD around the common core is identifying high-quality resources, said Ms. Bornemann, from Washington state.

"One of the challenges is that everybody, at least in their claims, appears to be aligned to the common core with professional development and instructional supports," she said. Looking at those resources with a critical eye and making sure they are high-quality before distributing them to teachers is essential, Ms. Bornemann said.

Those concerns were echoed by Mary Jane Tappen, the deputy chancellor for K-12 curriculum and instruction and student services for the Florida Department of Education.

States need to be "patiently aggressive" in developing and distributing professional development for teachers around the new common standards, she said.

"If we move too quickly, [the resources] won't be what we need them to be," she said. Making progress in providing those supports to teachers is also critical, however.

"We have to move forward because the students need to be prepared for success," said Ms. Tappen. "If we wait for the assessments [due out in 2014-15], they will not have had the instruction necessary. We have to patiently but aggressively prepare professional-development resources, and the teachers need to know what the standards are."

Ms. Tappen is focusing now on providing professional development around the common core to kindergarten teachers, since this year's group of kindergarteners will be the first to be tested on the common standards. Using the Internet is the only way to distribute those resources efficiently, she said.

"Given the size of our state, we know the only way to reach all our teachers is through the use of online tools," Ms. Tappen said.

“You have rural areas all over the nation where you might be the only [trigonometry] teacher in high school. The only way you can participate [in PD] is online.”

Having access to support resources is essential, she added. “We have got to have tools for [teachers] every day that they can access and network with different teachers.”

Tuning In to YouTube

[The James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy](#), an affiliate center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in Durham, N.C., is one of the providers of online resources on the common core. The organization has created a series of videos, posted on YouTube, that describe various aspects of the common core, such as how the standards were developed, what the key changes are in the subject areas involved, and the reasoning behind those changes.

“This is intended to spark a conversation,” said Lucille E. Davy, a senior adviser for the institute. The videos are designed not only for teachers, but also for school board members, policymakers, administrators, and even the PTA.

“Everyone needs to understand this—not just the teacher in the classroom,” Ms. Davy said.

As schools and educators get a better grasp on what the standards mean for students and teachers, more online and print resources will become available, said Ms. Davy. “Right now, I think you’re seeing the development of a lot of [curricular] materials,” she said, “and then the professional development to actually use those materials and teach the standards is the next frontier.”

And while providing much professional development for teachers on the scale that’s needed may seem overwhelming, Ms. Davy is hopeful that the common core will provide the economies of scale, especially with online professional development, needed to overcome some of the most persistent problems in K-12 education.

“The need to close the achievement gap was already here,” she said. “Implementing common core together gives us our best shot for achieving. We can work together, share best practices, and share the burden of doing the work so [states] are not doing it all alone.”

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When charter schools get too picky

Washington Post

By: Jay Mathews

October 22, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/class-struggle/post/when-charter-schools-get-too-picky/2011/10/22/gIQAJeGq8L_blog.html

The [Pacific Collegiate School](#) in Santa Cruz, Calif., is a public charter school. It must hold a random lottery when it has more applicants than vacancies. It is not supposed to be selective.

Yet somehow its average SAT score has risen to the top tenth of one percent among all public schools nationally. Less than ten percent of its students are low-income, compared to 40 percent in its city. Maybe that has something to do with the fact that the school is allowed to ask (not require, its principal emphasizes) that every family donate \$3,000 and 40 hours of volunteer time a year.

As a supporter of the charter school movement, I get grief from people who say that charters—independent public schools using tax dollars—are private schools in disguise. They are almost always wrong about that, but there are enough Pacific Collegiate situations to make me wonder if the rules need revision.

Places like California, where the law allows some preferences, are more likely to have this problem than D.C. The District’s charter law and demographics would give Pacific Collegiate a much more diverse student body.

That still leaves selective practices like the seven-page form, including essay questions, that applicants must fill out for the [Gateway High School charter](#) in San Francisco, or the lottery-exempt status as “[founding parents](#)” offered by some Los Angeles charters to applicants who promise money and volunteer time, as revealed by the L.A. Weekly newspaper.

Todd Ziebarth, vice president for state advocacy and support at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, said vague state laws let charter authorizers, such as universities, state or local school boards, occasionally wink at loopholes. To stop that, 12 Newark, N.J., charters have signed a compact barring any burdensome requirements, like attending information meetings or filling out long forms, before their lotteries.

There is a subtler issue. What if parents and students are discouraged by the higher standards that make the best charters worth attending? The KIPP schools, part of a charter network with longer hours and proven achievement gains, require that students, parents and teachers sign contracts affirming their responsibilities, such as promptness and good behavior. Some readers have told me they assume that students who violate those rules are expelled. The truth is that such contracts have been used by teachers to set guidelines in regular schools since long before KIPP began. Violators may be mildly disciplined, but not expelled.

I know that because I have investigated KIPP for ten years and have written a book about it. Some parents don’t have the time or inclination to ask a lot of questions. I can see why they might get the wrong impression or might just think their child is not up to so much work.

Pacific Collegiate principal Archie Douglas reminded me that his school requires every student to take at least five Advanced

Placement courses. I think that's great, but not all parents agree with me. Douglas says his school's request for funds and time is necessary because California financial support for charters is so low, about half of what D.C. charters get. Only 30 percent of his families donate as much as \$3,000, he said, although he was surprised to learn that a page on the school Web site still said the 40 hours of volunteer work was mandatory. He said he would have that statement deleted.

His school's distance from large low-income neighborhoods frustrates recruiting, but last year the school reserved six of a possible 56 slots for a lottery just for students whose parents had less than two years of college.

Gateway executive director Sharon Olken defends her application essay questions as a way to help parents and students think through what kind of school they want. Their answers are not read until after they are admitted. Nearly half of Gateway students are low-income, close to the city average, despite the long form.

I still don't think they need the essay questions. Charters spend public money. They should do everything possible to convince parents their doors are open to all, as long as that doesn't get in the way of the deep and imaginative teaching that they are there to provide.

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STATE NEWS

Indiana: Superintendent White says he has proof that charters 'dump' students back to Indianapolis Public Schools

Indianapolis Star

By: Scott Elliot

October 25, 2011

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20111025/LOCAL18/110250321/indianapolis-IPS-charter-schools-eugene-white?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|IndyStar.com>

But charter schools deny they 'dump' students

Superintendent Eugene White has long argued that Indianapolis Public Schools are victimized by charter schools that take a full year's worth of state aid but then dump students back on the district. Now, White said at a news conference Monday, he has the proof.

White said the district has testimony -- some of it videotaped -- from the families of 20 children who recently transferred to IPS from charter schools for reasons White labeled as questionable.

Charter schools, White said, find ways to get kids to transfer back to IPS after the state's September "count" day, which sets the enrollment figures upon which state funding is based. That way the charters can collect more than \$8,000 in state aid for each student while IPS is left to educate them with no funding.

Some methods used by charter schools to push students to transfer back to IPS are illegal, White said. For example, some parents told the district their charter schools wouldn't bus students to school from a homeless shelter or declined to offer special education services they needed.

Federal laws forbid public schools from discriminating against the homeless and also require them to provide special education.

No sooner had White held his news conference -- and called on the state to take action against the offenders -- than operators of some of the accused charter schools strongly denied any wrongdoing.

"It's a little puzzling what Dr. White is talking about," said Kevin Teasley, president of the GEO Foundation, which operates two schools White has accused. "I don't know the details, but I can tell you we have bent over backwards to meet every individual student's needs."

White promised letters of complaint to State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett and the schools' sponsors -- Ball State University or Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard.

White called on Bennett to take action against charters for which he said the district can document missteps: Christel House, Fall Creek Academy, Fountain Square Academy, Herron High School, Hoosier Academy, Lighthouse Academy, the Southeast Neighborhood School of Excellence and Imagine Life Sciences east and west academies.

Bennett's spokesman, Alex Damron, said Bennett's office would review the claims.

"It's too early at this point to validate or invalidate the specific claims within Dr. White's letter," Damron said.

Marc Lotter, Ballard's spokesman, said the mayor's office carefully tracks suspensions, expulsions and special education

offerings of charter schools his office sponsors. He said the mayor's charter school office would look at the allegations but stopped short of promising an investigation.

"We hold our charter schools to a very high accountability standard," Lotter said. "That's very well documented."

GEO's Fall Creek Academy is one of the schools White said declined to bus homeless kids. But Teasley said the allegation makes no sense because GEO schools serve several homeless families and are among the few charters that have their own buses. The foundation even won a federal grant to offer extra services to kids who are homeless, he said.

"It wouldn't make any difference to us whether you are homeless or not," he said. "We would pick you up for school."

Likewise, GEO's Fountain Square Academy -- accused by White of refusing to meet a student's special education needs -- has a significant special education population and robust program for the students, Teasley said. For example, the school serves profoundly autistic children.

Dana Johnson, GEO's vice president and a special education lawyer, said the organization's schools follow the law and have never had a complaint that required a due process hearing.

Other schools also were baffled. Christel House Academy was one of six schools White said agreed to drop expulsion proceedings if students transferred, saddling IPS with kids who deserved expulsion for serious offenses.

But Principal Carey Dahnke said he doesn't know what White is talking about.

"We've not had any students up for expulsion this year," he said.

Herron High School's Head of School Janet McNeal said there is "no basis" for White's similar complaints about Herron transfers.

Russ Simnick, president of the Indiana Public Charter Schools Association, said he has long been a skeptic of White's allegations and remains unconvinced.

"If parents believe their children are being denied an appropriate education in a public school, that is wrong and should be brought to light," he said. "I am not aware of a single instance in which this has happened."

The 20 suspect transfers were among a total of 72 transfers from charter schools that IPS documented since count day.

Assuming all of the 20 students were "dumped" for questionable reasons, the district would be out roughly \$160,000 -- less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the district's annual \$190 million general fund budget that provides for nearly 32,000 students.

One potential solution to White's concern is multiple count days on which school enrollments are recounted and funding adjustments are made based on where students have transferred. That would greatly reduce the financial incentive to dump students.

Bennett and Simnick both favor extra enrollment counts. White said he would support another count day, too, even though it might hurt IPS because more students are likely to leave IPS after count day than transfer into the district.

White said he'd favor it anyway as a matter of principle.

"I'm tired of people saying I'm making things up," he said. "No, we're not making it up. We just want people to be fair."

Although White realizes multiple count days might hurt the district's bottom line, "that's a fair way to do it."

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Idaho schools tie merit pay to parent involvement

Associated Press

By: Staff

October 24, 2011

<http://www.canadianbusiness.com/article/52890--idaho-schools-tie-merit-pay-to-parent-involvement>

TWIN FALLS, Idaho (AP) — Teacher bonuses will hinge on how well they engage parents in some south-central Idaho schools.

Districts in the rural farming communities of Wendell, Jerome and Gooding have adopted merit pay plans for some employees that tie bonuses to the level of participation in parent-teacher conferences, the Time-News reports (<http://bit.ly/mXYrN9>).

Idaho public schools were required to develop teacher pay-for-performance plans that could be based on a variety of factors, including test scores and attendance rates, under education changes that were signed into law earlier this year.

The education laws spearheaded by public schools chief Tom Luna and backed by the governor will also phase in laptops for high school teachers and students, and make online courses a requirement to graduate, among other changes.

Under the pay-for-performance piece of Luna's "Students Come First" plan, districts developed plans to boost the educator salaries based on a number of criteria.

The Wendell district decided to base merit pay bonuses on parental involvement at high school conferences because participation has been a problem in the past, Superintendent Greg Lowe said. Now, up to 70 percent of the potential bonus available to employees is based on how many parents show up for the conferences.

"They have really struggled to get parent involvement at parent-teacher conferences," Lowe said.

The district sent an automated phone message to parents as a reminder to attend conferences earlier this month. More than 40 percent of parents have to attend the meetings in order for teachers to earn the maximum merit pay bonus, a goal that was exceeded this fall, Lowe said.

In nearby Jerome, the district's middle school has also tied pay-for-performance to parent participation. The Gooding School District has a similar plan for seventh through 12th grades, with 25 percent of the teacher bonus based on parent attendance at three conferences throughout the academic year.

But at least one school in the region has put the focus on student involvement.

At the middle school in Wendell, 50 percent of the teacher merit pay plan hinges on the percent of pupils who complete portfolios for student leadership conferences. At least 90 percent of the students have to complete a portfolio for teachers to earn the maximum bonus.

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Louisiana Governor Jindal: Schools top list

Baton Rouge Advocate

By: Will Sentell

October 25, 2011

<http://theadvocate.com/news/1158359-123/jindal-schools-top-list.html>

Gov. Bobby Jindal said reforming public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade will be the top priority of his administration during his second term, which begins Jan. 9. Jindal was re-elected with 66 percent of the vote in Saturday's primary election.

Gov. Bobby Jindal said Monday that improving public schools will be the top priority of his second term.

"We have made great progress as a state," Jindal said.

But he added, "We have a lot more work to do."

Jindal made his comments in his first formal meeting with reporters since he was re-elected Saturday with 66 percent of the vote in a 10-candidate field.

The governor was heavily involved in races for the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and said he plans to do the same in the Nov. 19 runoff.

Jindal needs one more ally on BESE to emerge from the three election runoffs to win approval for John White as the next superintendent of education, officials said.

The governor has favored White for months but has been unable to get the eight votes needed on BESE, an 11-member panel that sets school policies.

White, 35, is superintendent of the Recovery School District, which oversees troubled schools in Baton Rouge, New Orleans and elsewhere.

Student achievement in Louisiana public schools regularly ranks among the lowest in the nation, and has for decades.

Earlier this month, the state announced that 44 percent of roughly 1,300 public schools earned a "D" or "F" under a new law that assigns letter grades to school performance.

Jindal noted that high school graduation rates and math and reading scores have shown gains and the number of failing schools has dropped.

But he said Saturday's results show that "voters want change; they want reform; they want accountability in our schools."

Jindal said economic development, a key priority of his first term, will be so again.

"Education reform is a key component of that," he said.

The governor did not spell out details of his upcoming education agenda.

He said he wants to give families more school choices, especially for students in troubled schools.

Three of five candidates backed by the governor won their contests in Saturday's election.

Jindal names three other BESE members.

Walter Lee of Mansfield, who won another term without opposition, says he will be the eighth vote for White if it comes to that.

"He only needs one of the three (runoff winners) really to get the eighth BESE member," said Penny Dastugue, who is president of BESE and a Jindal appointee.

One possibility is incumbent Chas Roemer of Baton Rouge, who faces Donald Songy in the District 6 BESE runoff that the governor called critical.

Roemer, who like Jindal is a Republican, is considered a near certain "yes" vote for White and was backed by the governor in the primary election.

"We absolutely will be helping Chas," Jindal told reporters.

Songy, a Democrat and former superintendent for the Ascension Parish school system, said earlier that he has a lot of reservations about White.

Another chance for Jindal rests with District 2, where incumbent Louella Givens of New Orleans faces Kira Orange Jones, also of New Orleans.

Jones, unlike Givens, is considered a possible White supporter if she wins.

However, that BESE district is heavily Democratic and Jindal's open support could hurt her bid.

Jones led in the four-candidate primary election with 39 percent to 31 percent for Givens.

Both are Democrats.

The other runoff is in District 8, which will match Carolyn Hill of Baton Rouge, a registered social worker against Jim Guillory of Plaquemine, a retired businessman.

Neither has committed to supporting White.

Hill led the four-candidate field with 29 percent of the vote to 28 percent for Guillory.

Hill is a Democrat. Guillory has no party affiliation.

Roemer finished with 45 percent of the vote to 29 percent for Songy and 27 percent for Beth Meyers of Denham Springs.

Songy on Monday was endorsed by Meyers in his runoff contest against Roemer.

In a prepared statement, Meyers said Songy is best suited to representing the interests of children in BESE District 6.

"His heart is in the right place," Meyers said.

Jindal also endorsed veteran BESE incumbent Glenn Lee Buquet of Houma, who was defeated.

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Cyberschools would receive funding under Michigan Senate proposal; critics raise concerns

Kalamazoo Gazette The Kalamazoo Gazette

By: Julie Mack

October 24, 2011

http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2011/10/cyberschools_would_receive_fun.html

KALAMAZOO — When supporters of cyberschools talk about changing Michigan law to fund the schools' expansion, they point to states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania, where thousands of students are enrolled in virtual charter schools.

"We're behind the curve," said state Sen. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair Township, chairman of the Senate Education Committee.

Cyberschools — schools that operate online — offer "a powerful way to deliver learning in the 21st century," he said.

Pavlov is an advocate for Senate Bill 619, which would lift current restrictions on cyberschools in Michigan and allow the programs to receive the same per-student foundation allowances as traditional public schools.

Ironically, cyberschool skeptics also point to Ohio and Pennsylvania as reasons for their caution.

"I'm really scared" by the cyberschool proposal, said Kevin Hollenbeck, a former Portage Public Schools Board of Education member and a senior economist who studies education issues at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. "There's been some real scandals where cyberschools get tons of money and provide almost no services.

"Cyberschooling is definitely an idea that needs to be thought through," he said.

Question of effectiveness

Last year, Pennsylvania's auditor general called for a moratorium on the creation of new cyberschools. Among the reasons: concerns about the schools' "excess profits."

"We can't afford to be wasting precious financial resources on schools whose costs have absolutely no basis whatsoever on what is actually needed to educate our children," Pennsylvania Auditor General Jack Wagner said in an October 2010 news release.

Friday, a spokesman for Wagner's office said that issues with cyberschool funding are "still on our radar."

Meanwhile, in May, the progressive think tank Innovation Ohio issued a report highly critical of that state's 23 "E-schools," saying their academic results were dismal and their costs were twice those of traditional public schools.

"Though E-schools can, in principle, be an effective and needed alternative to traditional schools, Ohio's E-schools are nothing short of a disaster," the report said. "Instead of a 'win-win' proposition, Ohio Eschools are a 'lose-lose' for the Ohio children who attend them and the Ohio taxpayers who fund them."

Despite the Innovation Ohio report, Ohio Gov. John Kasich is looking to expand cybereducation, and similar efforts are under way in Florida, Indiana, Texas and Louisiana.

In those states, as in Michigan, lawmakers are attracted to the cyberschool model for multiple reasons: It appeals to school-choice advocates, it can be a less-expensive way of delivering education, and it can serve populations such as home-schoolers and dropouts who don't want the traditional school model.

"We need to be innovative and give people options," said state Sen. Tonya Schuitmaker, R-Lawton. "This is a different generation."

House Speaker James Bolger, R-Marshall, suggests cyberschool critics are those who resent competition in public education. It's "a focus on turf for adults and misses the boat that it should instead be about options for students so all kids can learn," Bolger said.

"Cyberschools are not for all kids," he said. "I don't think they would have worked for me. But I think a variety of options is good, and a combination of options may be best."

A host of problems

While policymakers focus on the twin lures of school choice and possible cost savings, others say red flags abound.

Gary Miron, a Western Michigan University education researcher and one of the nation's foremost experts on charter schools, said he's a strong supporter of online learning but draws a distinction between a program that blends online learning with traditional education and a K-12 program that is entirely online.

"Virtual programs can be wonderful," Miron said. "But I don't think a whole virtual school is a wise thing."

He said he and other researchers "are very excited about online learning but very skeptical about cyberschools." Miron said cyberschools have "terrible records" in terms of academic achievement and fiscal accountability. He pointed to K-12 Inc., a for-profit company that is a leader in the K-12 online market: Its stock price is soaring, he said, yet only 25 percent of its schools make Adequate Yearly Progress under federal No Child Left Behind standards.

"It's just crazy," Miron said about the ability of distance education companies to rake in profits despite anemic academic results.

"I heard about a company that claims it can service special-ed students over the phone. Really? Come on."

Danger of fraud

There's also greater potential for outright fraud, both academic and financial, in cyberschools. On the academic front, there's the issue of ensuring that cyberschool students are doing their own work, particularly if students are not required to show up in person to take proctored tests.

As for financial misconduct, states have found it challenging to verify cyberschool enrollment. "These schools can sign up 1,000, 1,500 kids in no time, but then there's no way to track it if they leave," Miron said.

That's already become a big problem in higher education, where online learning is much more widespread. A report released last week by the U.S. Department of Education's Inspector General said 17 percent of the department's open cases now involve distance learning fraud and that since Aug. 1 it has opened 100 new cases involving thousands of suspects.

The fraud cases typically involve people who enroll in distance-learning programs and apply for federal financial aid without intending to take classes. Their goal is to collect the share of financial aid given to college students for living expenses; the schools also benefit from collecting tuition for nonparticipating students.

Does it work?

Beyond the fraud issues, the U.S. Department of Education has expressed reservations about the rapid expansion of online learning programs. In a report issued last year, federal education officials noted the dearth of high-quality research on the effectiveness of online K-12 programs and said it's still very unclear how online learning compares to traditional schooling in terms of academic achievement and under what circumstances it works and what circumstances it doesn't.

Considering the lack of research and the problems experienced in other states, Miron said he's surprised Michigan lawmakers

seem willing to open the door to cyberschools without reservation— and that they're willing to fund cyberschools at the same level as traditional schools, when online programs are considerably less expensive because there are minimal facility costs and less restriction on class size.

"The funding piece isn't right, and neither is the accountability piece," Miron said about SB 619.

"This rapid implementation of new models without research — it's not a good idea," he said. "They should try a few schools and test it out. Get it right and then expand it."

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Ohio: Educators aim to eliminate need for remedial college work

Cleveland Plain Dealer The Plain Dealer

By: Karen Farkas

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http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2011/10/educators_will_collaborate_to.html

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Educators across Ohio will team up to ensure that more high school graduates are ready for college-level work, instead of taking remedial math and English when they arrive on campus.

Currently, 41 percent of students who graduate from a public high school in Ohio take at least one remedial course when they enroll in one of the state's two- or four-year public institutions, according to the Ohio Board of Regents. The courses cost the same as general college classes but don't count toward a degree.

"Remedial education is not only expensive but it is a big discouragement to the student," said Kim Norris, spokeswoman for the Ohio Board of Regents. Only 26 percent of students who take a remedial course get an associate's or bachelor's degree, the regents said.

A new statewide initiative is aimed at aligning the high school curriculum with what students are expected to know by the time they reach college. Public high schools and colleges will work together on the Ohio High School and Higher Education Alignment Initiative, created by the Regents and the Ohio Department of Education.

Ten grants, each worth \$100,000 over three years, will be awarded in January to consortia of high schools, universities and career centers that submit the best proposal to create partnerships so that high school students can move successfully into college. Two grants will be awarded in each of five regions across the state, Sasheen Phillips, a senior executive director at the education department, told about 70 officials from high schools, colleges and other agencies Monday morning at a meeting at the Education Service Center in Valley View.

"The intent is to ensure students are ready and prepared," she said.

James Reed, principal of Cleveland Heights High School, said after the meeting that he is excited because the initiative creates a strong link between high schools and colleges regarding student expectations.

"If we can get a jump on students in high school and prepare them for the kind of work they need to do in college it is an opportunity to touch more students," he said.

The state's Education Department is allocating \$900,000 from the \$400 million it won in the federal government's Race to the Top competition for public schools toward the grants and will add \$100,000 from its budget.

Each partnership must include at least four high schools from at least two districts and a minimum of two community or four-year colleges. At least one school district must be participating in Race to the Top. Career/technical schools can also be included.

The partners in each consortium are to align high school requirements with college readiness expectations and have the necessary programs in place by fall 2013. They also must commit to sustaining the partnership beyond the three years of the grant. Proposals must be submitted by Dec. 5.

The state legislature has required public universities and community colleges to jointly establish uniform statewide standards in math, science, reading and writing by 2013 so school districts can prepare students to enter college without needing remedial classes, Norris said. Chancellor Jim Petro wants four-year universities to eventually phase out remedial programs.

Petro would like all 10th-graders to take a college readiness assessment so there is time to prepare them for higher education, Norris said.

"Remediation should not be taking place at the university level," she said.

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