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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/9/11

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### NATIONAL NEWS

## Online Learning Begins to Explode into the Mainstream in Blended Schools

Education Next

By: Michael B. Horn

May 6, 2011

<http://educationnext.org/online-learning-begins-to-explode-into-the-mainstream-in-blended-schools/>

This week, [Innosight Institute](#), where I am the executive director of the education practice, released a [landmark report titled "The rise of K-12 blended learning: Profiles of Emerging Models"](#), which profiles 40 different operators leading the rise of K-12 blended learning.

Across America a skyrocketing number of K-12 students are getting their education in blended-learning environments. Over 4 million K-12 students took at least one online course in 2010, according to [Ambient Insight](#), and this space is growing now by a five-year compound annual growth rate of 43 percent—much faster than the growth of charter schooling or other K-12 education reforms, for example. And the majority of this growth is occurring in different types of “blended learning.”

The report, by our senior research fellow, [Heather Staker](#), provides clarity as to what this term means, defining it based on the research as “any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home *and* at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace.”

We’re not talking about the end of school then by any means, nor are we talking about eliminating teachers. Parents need schools, students like to be with their friends, and teachers are crucial for learning—and the evidence is that teachers love working in online learning environments, whether they are blended or at a distance.

What we *are* talking about is the end of the classroom structure that was built to standardize the way students are taught and tested. The opportunity this is creating to remake and improve our education system is unprecedented. For the first time we have a way to create personalized pathways for each student that are affordable.

And as this report reveals, a lot of education leaders are working to do just that, from school districts like New York City and Albuquerque to charter organizations like KIPP and Rocketship Education, which is getting stellar results in its schools in San Jose, Calif.

One of the most interesting schools profiled is Carpe Diem, which both BusinessWeek and U.S. News & World Report have recognized as one of the top high schools in America—and for good reason, as [this video about the school attests](#).

And we're only scratching the surface of the personalization that is possible. There is a flowering of different models right now, as this report identifies (and should allow people to now better communicate about what they are and are not doing), as operators are trying a variety of different arrangements.

The report also identifies the technologies behind the different school models and who is using what. If anyone had any doubt that there are a lot of choices and options out there for content, for example, then look at the chart on page 161. There is unbelievable fragmentation of this market right now, with K12, Inc. and Apex Learning having the most usage among those schools profiled. Pearson dominates the Student Information System landscape with its PowerSchool product, and Blackboard dominates both the Learning Management System and Gradebook categories, although Pearson is just behind in the latter.

Lastly, the report also has some really important policy recommendations that echo the work of [Digital Learning Now](#), but also reflect the direct voice of the leaders of these programs, as they voice what policies and regulations are holding them back from taking this revolution in learning to the next level to even better serve America's students.

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## Early Education a Priority of New Federal Grant Pool

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

May 9, 2011

[HTTP://WWW.EDWEEK.ORG/EW/ARTICLES/2011/05/11/30RTTT\\_EP.H30.HTML?  
TKN=NRMFOAMFM3BAEU5J8XXKLLV8XKWE0J1XLHBO&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK](HTTP://WWW.EDWEEK.ORG/EW/ARTICLES/2011/05/11/30RTTT_EP.H30.HTML?TKN=NRMFOAMFM3BAEU5J8XXKLLV8XKWE0J1XLHBO&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK)

*Race to the Top provides a likely model for fresh state-level competitions*

Armed with a fresh \$700 million in an otherwise austere federal budget year, the U.S. Department of Education is trying to figure out how to leverage the money through a new round of state-level competitions focused, in part, on early-childhood education. The new funding—viewed as an extension of the Obama administration’s signature Race to the Top program—was part of last month’s congressional budget deal that cut nearly \$1 billion in funding from the U.S. Department of Education through September, after adjusting for the Pell Grant program.

But that agreement gave U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan \$700 million to design a new competitive grant program aimed partially at improving early-childhood care and education for low-income and disadvantaged infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

That focus comes in addition to the four policy priorities—improving data systems, standards and assessments, low-performing schools, and teacher effectiveness—that governed the \$4 billion Race to the Top contest won by 11 states and the District of Columbia last year.

Big questions remain about the new funding stream, however, since Congress gave the department very little guidance about how to spend the money. And so far, the agency has been silent about its plans.

One leading option being discussed by department officials: conducting a Race to the Top-like competition for states focused entirely on early education that would award either a significant portion of the funds or the entire pot. In fact, 43 Democratic lawmakers in the U.S. House last month urged Mr. Duncan in a letter to dedicate a “significant” chunk of the money for a separate, early-learning competition.

“We’re going to have a fantastic opportunity to really make a difference here,” Mr. Duncan said earlier this month, adding that the department had not decided what the new competition would look like or how much money would be set aside for early learning. Still, any new competition could differ in format from the original Race to the Top, which pitted states against each other as they devised ambitious education reform plans with an eye on the \$4 billion in prize money. Mr. Duncan and his staff created that competition from relatively vague guidelines set up by Congress in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic-stimulus package passed in 2009.

Those same vague guidelines, with a couple of exceptions, apply to the new \$700 million. Those exceptions include the new focus on early learning, the elimination of the requirement that half the grant money go to school districts, and a new requirement that early-childhood grants be awarded in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Whatever direction Mr. Duncan takes, the Education Department will have to move quickly to publicize the proposed rules and run them through the federal rulemaking process, so there’s enough time for the actual competition. The department must award the money by Dec. 31. It has yet to determine how long states will then have to spend their money.

### Sustaining the Brand

For Mr. Duncan, the \$700 million is a mechanism to keep the popular Race to the Top brand alive, even if the new grants are not formally part of the ARRA-created program. He used the promise of \$4 billion last year to urge states to expand their charter school sectors, link student test scores to teacher evaluations, and improve their data systems, among other measures. He also is seeking to make Race to the Top-like competitions part of the Elementary Secondary and Education Act, which is up for reauthorization in Congress.

The new money gives Mr. Duncan a chance to make his mark in the early-education arena.

Marci Young, the project director for Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Washington-based Pew Center on the States, said requiring states to address early-childhood learning as part of a de facto extension of Race to the Top, which she called the “nation’s leading reform template,” sends a strong signal of the federal commitment to early learning.

“We can’t race to the top when so many children are not even at the starting line,” she said.

Pre-K Now would not only like to see a separate competition focused on early learning, but want the department to make a state’s plans to improve access to high-quality prekindergarten programs a core application component of a general Race to the Top-like competition, if there is one this year.

Just how big a mark can be made with \$700 million is an open question.

W. Steven Barnett, the co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, said it would take \$2 billion in additional spending to provide every disadvantaged child with quality prekindergarten. In fact, total state spending on pre-K dropped in 2009-10, vs. the year before, as the recession continues to take its toll, according to the [latest annual report](#) from Mr. Barnett's group. Ten states did not fund pre-K at all last school year.

"If the federal government could leverage state [funding], there's enough money there to get us well on our way to doing that," he said.

But this new money is supposed to fund more than just pre-K, said Sara Mead, an early-childhood-policy expert and an associate partner at Bellwether Education Partners, a national education policy nonprofit. The goal, she said, is to encourage and fund comprehensive systems of early education that link together a patchwork of social services within states that serve children as young as infants, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. So to do this, \$700 million, or less, may not go very far, she pointed out.

"On the early-childhood side, you can't buy a lot of services with a small pot of money," said Ms. Mead, who also [blogs for edweek.org](#). "You can do some coordination. ... We do want integrated systems, but that isn't the way most states are set up."

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## Conservative 'Manifesto' Blasts Shared Curriculum, Tests

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

May 9, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/05/conservative\\_manifesto\\_blasts.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/05/conservative_manifesto_blasts.html)

A group made up largely of conservatives has issued a "manifesto" arguing against development of shared curriculum and tests for the common standards.

The [manifesto](#), issued today and signed by more than 100 leaders in education, business, and politics, is a response to a [document issued in March by the Albert Shanker Institute](#), which argued for common curriculum for the standards. It's also a response to the U.S. Department of Education's \$360 million investment in the development of assessments for the common standards. That money was awarded to [two big consortia of states](#) as part of the federal government's Race to the Top competition.

The newest entry into the debate about common standards and assessments was organized by [Williamson M. Evers](#), a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution; [Jay P. Greene](#) and [Sandra Stotsky](#), both professors at the University of Arkansas; [Greg Forster](#), a senior fellow at the Foundation for Educational Choice, and Ze'ev Wurman, a former U.S. Department of Education official who has worked on California's standards and tests in math. All have been critical of the [Common Core State Standards Initiative](#), which has led to adoption of a new set of shared learning guidelines in math and English/language arts by all but six states.

Calling itself a "counter-manifesto," the document issued today argues that shared curriculum and tests will stifle innovation, threaten local and state control of education decisions, and standardize learning for students with diverse needs. It also argues that shared curriculum and tests are prohibited by federal law.

In addition to attacking the Shanker Institute's proposal for shared curriculum and the Race to the Top assessment consortia's work to design common tests, the signatories criticize the [consortia's plans to develop curricular and instructional supports](#) such as content frameworks and model units.

Arguments for a common curriculum are flawed, the signatories argue, because there is no evidence that it would lead to higher student achievement or that there is one "best" approach to curriculum for all students. Additionally, they say, the standards on which they are based are not sound enough to serve as the foundation for such a curriculum.

Signers of the new manifesto did find one area of agreement with the Shanker Institute and the American Federation of Teachers, for whose late founder the institute was named: that curriculum should be developed before assessments. But such efforts should be decentralized and varied, not "centrally controlled" by an "elephantine, inside-the-Beltway bureaucracy," they write.

The Shanker Institute manifesto, which now has more than 200 signatories, said that it did not advocate one curriculum for all students, but multiple "curricular guides," all based on the common standards, that would allow teachers many ways to impart those standards.

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## FLORIDA NEWS

### Lawmakers deepened hole for Florida's schools, but also passed major reforms

St. Petersburg Times

By: Patricia Mazzei

May 8, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/lawmakers-deepened-hole-for-floridas-schools-but-also-passed-major-reforms/1168554>

*A legislator calls what was done bold; the state teachers union calls it damaging.*

TALLAHASSEE - For schools, the annual legislative session left in its wake a \$1.1 billion funding cut - and, unlike in years past, a slew of new policy reforms to go with it.

Lawmakers slashed spending by an average of \$542 per student, a cut of nearly 8 percent, steeper than the Florida House or Senate originally proposed.

And they overhauled how teachers are evaluated, paid and fired; made major changes to benefit privately-run charter and virtual schools; and expanded school voucher programs.

Gaping budget holes have overshadowed ambitious education policies before in the Legislature. But not this year.

"One of the things that we committed ourselves to - knowing that it was going to be double the work - was not to put educational policy in the back burner," said Rep. Erik Fresen, a Miami Republican who helped lead two educational committees in the House. "It was probably one of the boldest sessions regarding education policy."

That's not an opinion shared by the Florida Education Association, the statewide teachers union. In a statement, the FEA called the session "one of the most radical and damaging in our state's history."

For the past two years, the state bolstered its Pre-K-12 education budget with nearly \$1 billion in federal stimulus dollars. Legislators tried to backfill some of that hole with other money, but couldn't prevent reducing school funding to the lowest levels since 2006.

School districts across the state are already warning of painful choices they will have to make in coming months, including the possibility of unpaid employee furloughs and layoffs.

Pinellas is bracing for a budget shortfall of about \$66 million. Hillsborough estimates its hole could be nearly \$30 million.

"Every year, we're cut, cut, cut," lamented Georgia Slack, a lobbyist for the Broward district. "Like any piece of meat, we're down to the cartilage."

Lawmakers argue that school districts will save millions of dollars with the new requirement that teachers and other public workers contribute 3 percent of their pay toward their pension - a move that amounts to a pay cut for public employees.

The budget also assumes that districts kept their entire portion of an emergency fund the federal government awarded states last year. Florida asked districts to save the money, yet many of them used at least some of it to protect jobs.

Many districts hoped lawmakers would let them keep a property tax rate hike the Legislature allowed two years ago for school construction, maintenance and technology projects. The option was good only until this year.

They did not, saying that move would amount to a tax increase.

School districts did get a reprieve elsewhere, though: A provision tucked in the education budget will make fewer classes fall under mandatory class-size caps, easing the costs for schools to provide teachers, space and resources for smaller courses.

The change, however, was not without controversy from backers of the voter-approved, constitutional class-size requirement.

"This is a back-door way for noncompliance, which will erode the purpose of the mandate and render it basically null and void," Rep. Cynthia Stafford, D-Miami, said in a statement.

On the policy front, a veto-proof Republican majority in the House and Senate flexed its muscle to push through proposals that had been too heavy to lift in previous sessions - including the teacher pay and tenure bill, vetoed last year by former Gov. Charlie Crist.

This year, it became the first bill signed into law by Gov. Rick Scott.

Scott has also thrown his support behind moves he has said would give students more choices and foster educational innovation: allowing charter schools designated as "high-performing" to expand with less oversight from school districts, and opening the door for more companies to offer virtual classes online.

Democrats largely opposed the big-ticket changes, denouncing them as a concerted effort to weaken the traditional public school system. Charter and virtual schools are privately managed, but receive taxpayer dollars for each of their students.

Indeed, per-pupil funding for virtual schools was one of the few line-items in the education budget to get a boost. Charter schools, too, got a break: Those designated as "high-performing" will have to pay less in administrative fees to school districts.

In other policy moves, lawmakers expanded school vouchers to allow more students to leave public schools considered "failing." More kids will also be eligible for private-school vouchers for students with disabilities.

And - in a change bound to be popular - nearly 40,000 eighth- and ninth-grade students statewide who had been slated to take a standardized algebra exam will no longer have to do so if they took the course in middle school in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years.

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## Bills allow larger school class sizes, end tenure, expand school choice

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

May 6, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-legislature-school-laws-20110506.0.1644322.story>

In their final week of work, Florida lawmakers passed bills that would allow public-school class sizes to get larger, give charter schools approval to expand and end tenure contracts for teachers who don't have them by July 1.

The Florida Legislature also finalized a state budget that cuts school funding by almost 8 percent, or about \$542 per student.

Here are some of the education highlights. Some are awaiting Gov. Rick Scott's expected signature, and others already have it.

### *Class size*

This measure significantly cuts the number of courses that must meet Florida's strict class-size rules. Advocates say it makes the rules, approved by voters in 2002, more "rational" and less costly to cash-strapped school districts, which lobbied for the changes.

But some worry that after years of working to cut class sizes, Florida classrooms will now be packing in a lot more students, particularly in advanced high school courses. The 2002 rules required all "core" classes to be within caps but excused "extracurricular" classes.

The new measure changes the definition so far more classes are classified as "extracurricular."

Under the Legislature's proposal, the number of classes that have to meet class-size caps would drop by more than 500 — from 849 to 304. The caps are 18 students per class in pre-K-to-third-grade, 22 in the middle grades, and 25 in high school.

The classes that could be larger include all foreign language courses, starting with middle school offerings, and all Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes. Pre-calculus, trigonometry, American literature, marine science and western civilization are among others that could also exceed the caps.

The "core" classes, including most elementary and middle-school courses, would still remain within the caps. After October, however, districts could put three to five more children in each room, if creating a new class were not possible.

### *Charter schools*

Bills to expand charter schools — public schools run by private groups — were among a number of school choice measures lawmakers approved.

The measure allows "high performing" charters to get longer contracts and to expand more quickly, and it allows them to replicate their programs in other school districts. Charter school advocates say more than 30,000 Florida students are on waiting lists for A-and-B-graded charters, making an expansion necessary.

But some fear these schools will now operate with little oversight.

Other "choice" bills expand virtual or online options and broaden the pool of public schools from which students can transfer, selecting better-performing campuses if theirs is deemed to be "failing."

### *Teacher contracts*

On the heels of passing a far-reaching teacher merit-pay bill, lawmakers also passed a bill that prevents any teacher who does not have tenure-like protections on July 1 to get them.

The measure means teachers already on the job who do not yet have "continuing contracts," what many call tenure, won't be eligible for them.

### *Florida Constitution's "Blaine amendment"*

Voters next year will be asked to decide if they want to delete from the state constitution a sentence that prohibits state aid to religious institutions.

The section, called the "no aid" provision or "Blaine amendment," states that "no revenue of the state" can be given "directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution."

Lawmakers who pushed for a resolution to go to voters, said the measure named for a 19<sup>th</sup> Century congressman is rooted in anti-Catholic bigotry and could be used to discriminate against faith-based groups seeking government contracts.

But opponents argue the sentence is a firm statement on the importance of separation of church and state and should remain in Florida's constitution.

Voters get to decide in the November, 2012 election. The proposal needs 60 percent of the vote to pass.

#### **Algebra**

Lawmakers granted a reprieve to almost 40,000 Florida students who, because of complicated mixture of federal testing rules and state law, were slated to take a standardized algebra 1 exam this month.

The students all took algebra — but a year or more ago.

Testing begins Monday, but only for the more than 200,000 students currently enrolled in an algebra 1 classes.

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## **Buzz lacking in search for new commissioner of education**

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeffrey S. Solochek

May 6, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/buzz-lacking-in-search-for-new-commissioner-of-education/1168291>

*Nobody has even applied for the job yet.*

With a national reputation as a leader in education reform, and more aggressive changes on the way, Florida should be an easy sell for those seeking a new education commissioner.

But with less than three weeks until the deadline, the position hasn't generated much attention.

In fact, no one has yet applied.

"We've definitely not received any inquiries, and the firm has not alerted us to any," Education Department spokesman Tom Butler said of the effort to fill the spot being vacated by Eric J. Smith in mid June.

Some blame the state's open records laws that make official applications public.

"I've heard over the years â€¢ that Florida's sunshine laws prevent a lot of able people from applying for a bunch of jobs," Chester E. Finn Jr., whose think tank publishes the respected *Education Next* journal, said via e-mail.

Still, some board members predicted a strong field of candidates in the end. "This is a very prestigious and very attractive position," said Akshay Desai of St. Petersburg.

Former State Board of Education chairman T. Willard Fair of Miami agreed that the position should lure the nation's top reformers, considering the state's track record on issues as wide ranging as charter schools and performance pay.

But he doubts that it will.

"I think anyone with any sense would not apply for the job," Fair said. "It's obvious in the way that Commissioner Smith's tenure was handled."

Fair left his term-limited post before Gov. Rick Scott could appoint a replacement, to protest Scott's maneuvering to oust Smith, who ultimately resigned. He said Smith remains popular and respected in many education policy circles.

"Anybody in their right mind would pick up the phone and say, 'What happened, Eric?'" Fair said.

The answer, he suspected, will keep several away.

Roberto Martinez, a state board member of Coral Gables, noted that the pool of potential candidates is not big.

"I don't think there are 20 to 30 people who are qualified," he said. At least a few of the big names - former D.C. chancellor Michelle Rhee, Rhode Island commissioner Deborah Gist, Virginia education secretary Gerard Robinson and Hillsborough superintendent MaryEllen Elia - have said they're happy in their current jobs.

"Interestingly, there has been almost no buzz about the Florida commissioner of education position in recent months," Patrick Riccards, who runs the Eduflack blog, said in an e-mail.

Riccards expected the ultimate choice will be surprising in a different way.

"My top choice would be Gist," he said. "But if you are looking for a few names that would be 'interesting,' I'd add the New Teacher Project's Tim Daly (a Rhee protegee), Bill Evers (assistant secretary of education under George W. Bush), or a large urban school district superintendent, such as Paul Vallas, who just left New Orleans."

With many states seeking talent from a relatively slim "bench" of GOP education reformers, Florida would be wise to actively recruit candidates, suggested Finn.

Such conversations are in play, said Kathleen Shanahan, a member of the state board from Tampa. The lack of applications doesn't mean that board members and the search firm are not conferring with potential candidates, she noted, remarking, "They are a recruiting firm."

Ray and Associates is set to give the board an update on the search on May 17. Candidate interviews are scheduled for June 1.

For Martinez, one thing is certain: Smith can't be easily replaced.

"He's been the best commissioner in the nation the past three years," he said. "I'm looking for his identical twin."

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Reading bill sends the right message**

The Oklahoman

By: Editorial Board

May 8, 2011

[http://newsok.com/reading-bill-sends-the-right-message/article/3565429?custom\\_click=headlines\\_widget](http://newsok.com/reading-bill-sends-the-right-message/article/3565429?custom_click=headlines_widget)

BY the time the 2011 legislative session wraps, the state's educators will have plenty of changes to dissect. None, we hope, will have greater impact than a renewed focus on making sure children can read at grade level by the time they finish third grade.

Lawmakers are set to meet for a few more weeks. Headed to the governor is a bill that would give businesses and individuals tax credits for funding private school scholarships for some public school students. One bill being considered would require students to be a few months older before they start prekindergarten or kindergarten.

Others have been signed into law. Two of those — the reading bill and another plan to issue letter grades to schools — are major parts of state schools [Superintendent Janet Barresi](#)'s education reform agenda. Another change is the elimination of trial de novo as part of teacher due process.

The reading bill has been touted as an end to social promotion. That description has a nice political ring to it. But what it's called matters little as long as it works.

Last school year, 69 percent of third-grade students tested scored at a proficient level on the state-mandated reading test. That left 6,000 third-grade students who scored unsatisfactory and another 10,000 who scored at a limited-knowledge level, according to state education officials.

Barresi describes the reading bill as a "line in the sand" while acknowledging it's only part of a much larger effort needed to improve public education. She's right, especially on the latter. It's easy for proponents and opponents of individual reform efforts to sell the ideas as a cure-all when no such reform exists.

Like any reform, execution is everything. The reading bill is set to take effect this fall but third-grade students won't immediately begin to face retention. First-grade students in the 2011-12 school year will be the first to confront the retention provision when they hit third grade.

In the interim, Barresi's plan calls for a fresh focus on reading skills in the early grades and intervention opportunities for struggling readers before they advance to third grade. It also includes some exceptions to the retention policy for students with disabilities and students still learning English. The plan also includes guidelines for promoting students midyear if their reading skills improve and alternate ways students can show they have third-grade reading skills.

How poorly students must be reading before they are put in the intensive intervention and retention pipeline will be worked out as education officials write rules for the new program. That determination is critical.

The state indeed needs a proverbial line in the sand. It is not OK that thousands of students every year don't finish third grade with the reading skills they need for academic success. They need a much better start.

## Ohio: Budget expands school voucher programs

Cincinnati Enquirer

By: Jessica Brown

May 7, 2011

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20110507/NEWS0108/105080340/Budget-expands-school-voucher-programs>

### *House plan also would open charter door to for-profit companies*

The budget approved Thursday by the GOP-controlled Ohio House expands the state's voucher programs and adds a controversial amendment that would let for-profit companies open charter schools.

The move is likely to provide more choices for parents on where to educate their kids. But it may also cause some districts' enrollment to plunge - especially the large urban districts like Cincinnati. Dropping enrollment consequently hurts those schools' budgets.

The charter school changes will be closely watched, particularly in Hamilton County, which is home to 22 of Southwest Ohio's 28 charter schools. Of the roughly 50,000 school-aged children in the city of Cincinnati, about 10,000 attend private or parochial schools, 6,600 attend charter schools and the rest go to Cincinnati Public Schools.

Ohio is home to about 300 charter schools serving about 90,000 to 100,000 students - or around 5 percent of the school-aged population, according to the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools. That number is growing, but not anywhere near the pace when charter school law was introduced in the late 1990s.

Charter schools are public schools that are publicly funded but privately operated.

Locally as a group their students perform worse academically than public school students and some schools have been prone to financial instability. Those issues have driven criticism of the House amendments.

Here's what the budget will do:

- Allows for-profit companies to start charter schools. This is a big and controversial shift from current state law, which requires any for-profit charter operator to be overseen by a non-profit governing board. Critics say the House change guts accountability for schools. Even those in the charter school field are uncomfortable with the change.

"It takes the public out of public charter schools in Ohio," said Bill Sims, president of the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools. The Ohio Association of School Business Officials also testified against this proposal.

- Increases from 50 to 100 the number of charter schools an entity can sponsor. Sponsors must also meet certain conditions to create new charter schools. For example, an entity could only open an additional charter school if it is in compliance with reporting requirements and is not ranked in the lowest 10 percent of sponsors based on student performance.

Kasich's original proposal was a bit stricter than what the House approved. Kasich wanted to block entities from opening new schools if any of their current schools were in the lowest two categories on the Ohio Report Card - Academic Watch or Academic Emergency. In Hamilton County, 10 of the 23 charter schools fall into this category.

- Expands community schools' rights to buy or lease school district buildings not being used. Cincinnati Public Schools owns multiple buildings that have gone vacant due to reconstruction or consolidation. This measure might limit the district's options when it wants to put them on the market.

• Keeps a cap on online schools. Kasich had wanted to remove that cap, but the House wants it in effect until the General Assembly can set operational guidelines for those schools. About 27 of Ohio's 300 charter schools are online schools. Enrollment at those so-called e-schools rose 7 percent between the 2008-2009 school year and the 2009-10 school year, compared to only a 1 percent rise at brick-and mortar charter schools.

- Quadruples the number of school vouchers offered. Vouchers offer students who attend or live near low-performing schools scholarships of up to \$5,000 to transfer to private schools. In the Cincinnati region, 35 public schools are considered low-performing, and therefore could lose students to vouchers, including 30 in Cincinnati.

The number of vouchers offered would increase from a 14,000 student limit to 60,000 by fiscal year 2013. This year, families of more than 15,000 students applied for vouchers, so some won't get them unless the program is expanded for the 2011-12 school year.

The budget also expands the number of schools eligible for vouchers by changing the definition of a "low-performing" school. Chad Aldis, executive director of School Choice Ohio, estimates that between 130,000 to 140,000 of Ohio's roughly 2 million

school children would be eligible under the new plan, compared to about 85,000 now.

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## Times updates and expands value-added ratings for Los Angeles elementary school teachers

Los Angeles Times

By: Jason Song and Jason Felch

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<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-value-added-20110508,0.930050.story>

*New data include ratings for about 11,500 teachers, nearly double the number covered last August. School and civic leaders had sought to halt release of the data.*

The Los Angeles Times on Sunday is releasing a major update to its elementary school teacher ratings, underscoring the large disparities throughout the nation's second-largest school district in instructors' abilities to raise student test scores.

The posting — the only publication of such teacher performance data in the nation — contains value-added ratings for about 11,500 third- through fifth-grade teachers, nearly double the number released last August. It also reflects changes in the way the scores were calculated and displayed.

Overall ratings for about 470 schools also are included in the release, which is based on student standardized test scores from the academic years 2003-04 through 2009-10. To obtain the rating of a teacher or school, go to latimes.com/valueadded and enter the teacher's or the school's name.

The initial release of teacher ratings last summer generated intense controversy — and some praise — across the country, and this round has already met with some opposition.

The Los Angeles Unified School District superintendent and other civic leaders, in a letter to the newspaper's publisher, recently asked The Times to reconsider publishing the ratings, saying in part that individual teachers' performances should be addressed in private conversations.

More than 1,000 teachers responded to The Times' invitation to view their scores before publication, but few took the opportunity to write comments alongside their ratings. Instructors were strongly advised not to do so by their union, United Teachers Los Angeles, which has opposed publication of the ratings.

Some of those who did comment said they saw the information as valuable but added that it did not reflect the sum total of their performance.

"Being a relatively new teacher, I welcome feedback that will help me to adjust my teaching to best fit my students' needs," said Amy Miller, who has taught fifth grade at Park Western Place Elementary School, one of about 140 teachers to write comments in the database. "It is, however, only one data point."

Others denounced the newspaper, calling its statistics "invalid" and its ratings "a scarlet letter."

"Once again you have violated the right to privacy of thousands of teachers," wrote Patricia Hill, who has taught at Windsor Hills Math Science Aerospace Magnet School.

One teacher offered a suggestion: "How about publishing the names of the highly effective and effective teachers only," said Steven Butts, who has taught fourth grade at Broadway Elementary School. "I do ... believe that more positive recognition for the successful teachers would encourage all teachers to strive for excellence and seek the guidance from those who have proven results year after year."

Value-added analysis attempts to estimate a teacher's contribution to student learning by tracking students' progress on standardized tests from year to year. Each student's performance is compared with his or her own in past years, an approach that experts say largely controls for influences beyond a teacher's reach, such as poverty, parenting and prior learning.

Because value-added is, like any other statistical approach, subject to error and is based only on test results, most experts agree it should be used as just one gauge of a teacher's overall performance. But many say it is the most objective measure available, and districts around the country are adopting it, largely because of federal incentives.

In the interest of greater clarity and accuracy, The Times made several changes in its approach. More information is now shown about the precision of each estimate and how a teacher ranks relative to other teachers in the district. The analysis also takes into account additional variables related to a student's socioeconomic background and the composition of a teacher's class. As in the first release, The Times used data obtained from the district through the California Public Records Act.

The changes have not altered the broad conclusions reported by The Times last summer, and the ratings for most teachers

changed very little overall.

As before, effective teachers were spread more or less evenly throughout the district. But there were often large disparities among instructors who taught similar students in similar schools — even within the same schools. The differences among teachers were more than three times as great as those among schools.

The vast majority of teachers' ratings were not significantly influenced by the characteristics of the students they taught, and a teacher's background and training had little to do with his or her performance, according to a [study](#) of the updated ratings prepared for The Times by economist Richard Buddin.

Many experts say it's not enough for a value-added approach simply to compare a student's performance to that in previous years—one must adjust for other factors such as race and ethnicity, parents' education or classroom composition. Different value-added formulas adjust for different things—leading to different results.

To convey how much difference such adjustments can make, The Times is publishing a [comparison](#) of results from four value-added models for each teacher. Each model uses a slightly different combination of variables to estimate a teacher's contribution. On average, the results are very similar but, in specific cases, they can vary sharply.

For its analysis, The Times adopted the model that included the most variables available.

More than a week ago, the newspaper received a letter from civic leaders requesting that The Times reconsider publication of the ratings. The letter was signed by John Deasy, L.A. Unified superintendent; Monica Garcia, Board of Education president; Elise Buik, chief executive of United Way of Greater Los Angeles; and Gary L. Toebben, chief executive of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce.

Among their concerns was that the ratings were likely to confuse educators and parents because the district has done its own value-added analysis of the data. It recently released overall school ratings to the public and it is planning to confidentially release individual ratings to third- through ninth-grade teachers by the end of the school year.

The model used by the district, which is seeking to persuade the union to include the ratings in formal teacher evaluations, is broadly similar to the one adopted by The Times. But The Times analyzed seven years of data, while the district analyzed up to four. The district and The Times adjusted the data to control for slightly different variables.

In addition, the civic leaders wrote that individual teacher evaluations should be conducted privately for the purpose of helping teachers improve.

Times Editor Russ Stanton said the newspaper went ahead with publication because it is confident of the reliability of its analysis and believes the public has a right to the information. Posting the database, Stanton said, "is a service to the people of Los Angeles."

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