

From: [Clare Crowson \(Clare@floridapromise.org\)](mailto:Clare@floridapromise.org) <ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com>

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NATIONAL NEWS

Lead or get out of the way on schools

Politico

By: Jeb Bush

August 4, 2011

<http://dyn.politico.com/printstory.cfm?uuid=6887E53A-9862-4019-84C0-B11598A1BD21>

From managing our nation's finances to designing policies that create more jobs for America's workers and graduates, federal leaders are consumed by capital related decisions.

But education must be a top priority. It nurtures our most precious natural resource – the human capital of the skills and talents of our young people.

Improving the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is a good start. This must, however, put students first, support effective teachers and continue to hold everyone accountable for results.

Thanks, in part, to reforms passed a decade ago; student achievement across the nation has improved. On the Nation's Report Card's main tests, 4th and 8th grade reading and math scored gains in 49 of 50 states. But much work still must be done to equip students for a dynamic, global workforce.

Yet ESEA reauthorization has all but stalled, creating enormous uncertainty for our schools, teachers and students.

For example, the act requires states to reach 100 percent proficiency on state academic tests by 2014. But even with exemptions, the states showing the most rapid improvement will not meet this mark.

Some state leaders have responded to Washington's inaction by announcing they will ignore the law's provisions. Others have simply lowered exam passing thresholds to technically – but shamefully – comply. Reductions of this sort are tragic, since many state standards are already too low.

Without reauthorization, Education Secretary Arne Duncan should use existing waiver authority to provide regulatory relief, so leading states can pass reforms that deliver results for students. States like Indiana, Florida and others provide a clear template.

Not all states should be given this flexibility. The bar should be set high, with greater flexibility rewarded only to states that implement bold reforms that improve the quality of education and student achievement.

This could free states moving from "pass/fail" to an A-F school grading system, based on student proficiency and academic growth. A-F systems are more intuitive to parents and the public. They also help leaders to clearly differentiate rewards and

interventions for schools.

Florida, for example, pioneered the practice of awarding schools letter grades based on a balanced formula of student proficiency and learning gains — with an emphasis on the advances made by the lowest performing students.

Policymakers in Arizona, Indiana, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Utah have adopted similar plans, while others are now looking at it.

Duncan should also consider rewarding states with the highest levels of transparency with greater flexibility.

Research now proves what parents and students knew: the quality of the teacher is the single most important factor in student achievement. The education bill requires “high qualified teachers” – but measured only by teacher credentials.

Many states and school districts are now adopting more advanced data systems, linking student performance to teachers. For the first time, we can measure teacher effectiveness using transparent objectives and standards.

Washington should embrace this reform — giving states that measure teacher quality based on student learning, flexibility from regulations.

Washington can also include waivers and incentives in the education bill so it can encourage states to expand educational choice and digital learning. Today’s students deserve new, innovative approaches to education.

States can use digital learning to offer every student an education environment tailored to their learning pace and style. Students trapped in a failing school should be offered the lifeline to success that educational choice provides.

Some in Washington argue that these waivers permit the Executive Branch to legislate a congressional bill. The way to address this concern is to ensure that regulatory relief is only granted in exchange for advancing real reform. The states receiving this relief can help inform the education reauthorization process when it is taken up by Congress.

Washington’s inaction should not prevent governors, state chiefs and district leaders from implementing the next generation of reforms for our students. If DC won’t act, it should at least support those that are.

This is not a Democrat or Republican issue. Our nation’s destiny is at stake. As policy and funding discussions take place, leaders in both parties must work together to reward what matters most: student achievement.

Jeb Bush is the former governor of Florida and chairman of the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

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The Public Weighs In on School Reform

Education Next

By William Howell, Martin West and Paul E. Peterson

Fall 2011 / Vol. 11, No. 4

<http://educationnext.org/the-public-weighs-in-on-school-reform/>

Intense controversies do not alter public thinking, but teachers differ more sharply than ever.

Public education has rarely been far from the national headlines over the past year. Efforts to limit teachers’ collective-bargaining rights led to mass protests in several states. The enactment of voucher programs renewed the debate over the role of private school choice in American education. Meanwhile, the first significant budget cuts in recent memory forced public school districts to tighten their belts in unprecedented ways. The Obama administration has encouraged a nationwide effort to develop common school standards. And let’s not forget *Waiting for “Superman,”* the high-profile documentary whose poignant portrayal of the charter-school admissions process, coupled with a critique of union power in public schools, was expected to have a significant impact on national opinion.

But how have Americans actually responded to these developments? Have they grown more supportive of the current direction of school reform, or are there instead signs of a backlash? And how do the views of teachers compare to those of the public at large?

These are among the questions we explore in this, the fifth-annual *Education Next*–PEPG Survey, which interviewed a nationally representative sample of some 2,600 American citizens during April and May of 2011 (see sidebar for survey methodology). In addition to the views of the public as a whole, we pay special attention in this year’s survey to two potentially influential types of participants in school politics: the affluent and teachers. To our knowledge, this is the first survey of a nationally representative sample of affluent Americans, defined as college graduates who are in the top income decile in their state. This is the third year we have surveyed a nationally representative sample of teachers, defined as full-time teachers currently working in public schools. Both the affluent and teachers pay more attention to public education and participate more actively in school politics than the general public, making their views worthy of close scrutiny (see sidebar).

Teachers and the Affluent: Paying Attention, Participating, and Holding Opinions

A highly decentralized, democratic system of education affords all sorts of opportunities for average citizens to weigh in on public schools. Through votes, school board meetings, petition drives, and direct advocacy, all citizens, at least in principle, can influence public education.

Principle and practice, however, often part ways. That all citizens can influence public education is not to say that all citizens do so. Generations of political science research confirm that higher-income and, especially, better-educated citizens are orders of magnitude more likely to participate in politics. And recent evidence demonstrates that teachers are far more likely to vote in school board elections than is the general public.

In our own survey, 37 percent of the American public claims to pay either “a great deal” or “quite a bit” of attention to issues involving education, while 54 percent of the affluent and an overwhelming 84 percent of teachers do so.

Public opinion surveys routinely overstate the levels of turnout in elections. Hence, it is difficult to know what to make of the absolute numbers of any particular group that reports voting. By comparing across groups, though, we can generate reasonable estimates of the relative tendency of people to vote. When we do, we find further evidence of the high rates of political participation among both the affluent and teachers. Compared to the American public at large, members of the affluent group are 16 percentage points more likely to report having voted. Teachers are fully 18 percentage points more likely to report having done so.

These two groups also are more likely to pronounce a clear view about the quality of schools and the value of different education reforms. The percentage that selects the “don’t know” or “neither support nor oppose” categories is almost always larger for the general public than for either the affluent or teachers.

Our findings reveal more stability than change in public opinion over the five years since the *Education Next*–PEPG survey began, suggesting that the momentous policy developments of the past year were not caused by—nor have they yet produced—broad changes in popular views. The one exception to that generalization is a significant turnaround in support for school vouchers, which until this year had been in decline.

The views of the affluent resemble those of the general public, except that the affluent are more likely to hold strong opinions and even larger percentages support the positions taken by a plurality of the general public. However, the well-to-do are more skeptical of online learning. They also hold the public schools in their own community in comparatively high regard, perhaps because they have better access to good public schools.

Teacher opinion often diverges from that of both the affluent and the general public. Teachers are much more likely to give schools high marks; on many issues, a majority of teachers takes the side opposite to that of the larger public, revealing tensions between what Americans overall think is best and what employees within the education industry prefer.

Teacher Rights and Policies

Wisconsin’s curtailment of the collective bargaining rights of teachers and other public employees was undoubtedly the top education news story of early 2011. In protest, teachers called in sick in droves, union members crowded the state capitol, and Democratic senators refused to attend legislative sessions. President Obama supported the protests, while Republican leaders lent their support to the embattled Wisconsin governor. Similar issues involving union rights and teacher prerogatives percolated in other states as well, including Indiana, Tennessee, Ohio, and even Massachusetts.

What was the public response? Are the opinions of teachers and the public converging or diverging? The short answer: Public opinion on issues involving teacher rights and prerogatives has remained essentially unchanged, but teachers’ opinions are diverging on key issues.

Teachers Unions. When asked whether teachers unions have a generally positive or negative effect on the nation’s public schools, 33 percent of the public gives a negative response, virtually unchanged from the 31 percent and 33 percent who perceived a negative impact in 2009 and 2010, respectively (see Figure 1). The share perceiving a positive union impact on schools hardly budged, changing only from 28 percent in 2009 to 29 percent in 2011. A sizable plurality of 38 percent continues to hold a neutral position, suggesting that the debate over the role of teachers unions is hardly over. The views about teachers unions held by the affluent are more negative, with no less than 56 percent saying unions have a negative impact on their schools.

Among teachers themselves, opinion is moving in precisely the opposite direction from that of the public at large. Only 17 percent now say that unions have a negative impact on the nation’s schools, down from 25 percent in 2010. Fifty-eight percent think they have a positive impact, up from 51 percent the previous year.

Teacher Tenure. Opposition to teacher tenure edged upward, but not to a significant degree. Between 2009 and 2010, those opposed to tenure shifted slightly from 45 percent to 47 percent, and in 2011 that percentage again ticked upward to 49 percent. Moreover, tenure supporters slipped from 25 percent in prior years to 20 percent in 2011. Unless the trend continues in future years, not much should be made of these small shifts. Among the affluent, opposition to tenure was much greater—no less than 67 percent. Meanwhile, teachers like tenure more than ever. Fifty-three percent now say they support tenure, up from 48 percent a year ago.

If tenure is to be given at all, the public thinks it should be based on demonstrated success in raising student performance on state tests. Those who say tenure should be based on student academic progress increased from 49 percent to 55 percent between 2010 and 2011. The well-to-do also like the idea, with 61 percent giving it their support. Teachers, however, were far less enthusiastic about the idea, only 30 percent giving it a favorable nod.

Merit Pay. The issue of merit pay made national news in 2010 when then Florida governor Charlie Crist vetoed a controversial bill requiring that teachers statewide be paid based on their classroom performance. Although Crist's veto brought him favor with the state's teachers unions, his successor signed similar legislation in 2011. Meanwhile, states and districts around the nation continue to experiment with new models of teacher compensation.

The public tends to favor merit pay, and recent developments have not altered that fact in one direction or another. A near majority (47 percent) of the American public favors paying teachers, in part, based on the academic progress of their students on state tests, about the same percentage as in 2007. Only 27 percent of the public opposes the idea, with the balance undecided. Affluent respondents were only modestly more likely (52 percent) to favor merit pay. The idea remains anathema to teachers, however, with only 18 percent in favor, and 72 percent opposed (see Figure 2). Despite the Obama administration's continued efforts to build support for merit pay among teachers, the vast majority remains unconvinced.

Teacher Compensation. If teachers and the public disagree on many things, the public nonetheless wants to pay teachers well. Fifty-five percent of the public thinks salaries should increase, virtually the same percentage that voiced that opinion two years ago. Support for higher teacher salaries among the affluent is slightly higher (59 percent). Those who do not favor increases think salaries should remain at current levels. Only 7 percent of the public as a whole thinks teacher salaries should be cut. Needless to say, salary increases for teachers is hardly an issue among teachers themselves. Eighty-two percent of them give the proposal their wholehearted support (see Figure 3).

Support drops, however, when those surveyed are told how much the average teacher in their state is currently paid. It falls to 43 percent, although a majority (52 percent) of the well-to-do still favors a salary increase. Learning the actual salary levels had little impact on the thinking of teachers themselves, over three-quarters (76 percent) of whom continue to back the idea.

When Americans are asked to choose between increasing teacher salaries and reducing class sizes, they regularly select the latter option. Even when they are told that "reducing average class sizes by three students would cost roughly the same amount as increasing teacher salaries by \$10,000," 44 percent of Americans select class-size reduction, whereas 28 percent select increasing teacher salaries. The affluent have similar views. By contrast, roughly equal numbers of teachers would choose salary increases as would choose class-size reduction.

Of course, teacher remuneration goes well beyond salaries. On average, teachers enjoy considerably larger pension benefits and health-care packages than do comparable professionals in the private sector, a point of contention in recent policy debates. In April 2011, for example, Ohio enacted legislation requiring all public employees, including teachers, to contribute at least 15 percent of the cost of their health-care benefits. Yet the battle over the issue is far from over: The Ohio Education Association recently collected a one-time assessment of \$54 from each of the state's teachers, raising \$5 million to advocate for the law's repeal.

It is of interest, then, that the American public tends to look favorably on a proposal that would require teachers "to pay from their salaries 20 percent of the cost of their health care and pension benefits, with the government covering the remainder." By a nearly two-to-one margin, the American public favors this policy. The margin of support is even larger among the affluent, a majority of whom back this requirement. Teachers overwhelmingly reject this cost-cutting measure, with opponents outnumbering supporters more than two to one.

Teacher Certification. In most states, teachers must take approximately 30 hours of instruction at a school of education before they may be certified as a teacher. A substantial body of research demonstrates that such instruction does not translate into higher student performance. And the American public seems to have caught on. A plurality of Americans supports (42 percent, while 31 percent oppose) allowing principals to "hire college graduates who they believe will be effective in the classroom even if they do not have formal teaching credentials." As for the affluent, no less than 61 percent support the relaxation of teacher hiring requirements. Existing teachers, by contrast, steadfastly oppose the practice, perhaps because virtually all of them underwent the formal credentialing process. Fully 60 percent of teachers object to the idea of principals being allowed to hire college graduates who do not have formal teaching credentials, and only 28 percent support it.

All in all, the Wisconsin controversy seems to have contributed to a divergence of opinion between teachers and the general public. The biggest changes in opinion took place within the teaching profession, which moved further away from the views of the public at large. The public, and especially the affluent, nonetheless want to pay teachers more.

School Choice

A strong case can be made that 2010 and 2011 were among the very best years school choice has yet enjoyed. The number of students in charter schools grew to 1.7 million, and several states raised caps on the number of charter schools that will be permitted to open in the future. Indiana, Ohio, Florida, Arizona, and New Mexico all passed voucher legislation of one kind or another, and Congress restored the federal school-voucher program it had previously shut down in Washington, D.C. What has been the public's response?

Vouchers. Opinion on vouchers varies, depending on how the question is posed. We therefore randomly assigned respondents

to two groups, one of which was asked a question that might be termed “voucher-friendly” in that it emphasizes giving a choice to parents. The other half was asked a question that might be termed “voucher-unfriendly” in that it emphasizes students going to private school at public expense. Not surprisingly, members of the public are more likely to say they like vouchers (47 percent) if asked the first question than if asked the second (39 percent). (See Figure 4 for the wording of the questions and the pattern of responses to each.)

There is little scientific basis for deciding which of these questions is the “right” one to ask. Instead of focusing on the number obtained by either question, therefore, it often is more informative to look at differences between groups and changes that take place over time.

Viewed in these ways, three facts stand out. First, support for vouchers increased by 8 percentage points between 2010 and 2011. This was the largest shift of public opinion over the course of the past year. If the public debate altered anything, it was regarding this specific topic. That the change in opinion is registered by responses to both questions leads one to conclude that the survey identified a genuine political development. Second, the affluent express more opposition to vouchers than the general public. The level of opposition is 12 percentage points higher in response to one version of the question and 4 percentage points higher on the other. Third, teachers are the least enthusiastic about vouchers. Although their opinions, like those of the general public, shifted in a favorable direction in 2011, teachers are still as much as 25 percentage points more opposed to vouchers than is the public as a whole.

Tax Credits. Public opinion on other school-choice issues remains stable. When it comes to tax credits for education expenses for families attending either public or private schools, a majority is in favor, and opposition is less than 20 percent. Almost the same can be said for the more common approach of offering tax credits for individual or corporate donations to scholarship programs. On both items, though, little change is detected from previous years. Nor do either the affluent or teachers think much differently.

Charter Schools. When asked about charters, 43 percent of the American public comes out in support, hardly different from the percentage that did so in 2010 (see Figure 5). The most common response, though, continues to be “neither support nor oppose.” When one segment of respondents was asked to choose between “support,” “oppose,” and “don’t know,” a similar proportion selected “don’t know” as had selected “neither support nor oppose,” again suggesting that Americans either do not understand what charter schools are or have not made up their minds about them (see [“Educating the Public,” features](#), Summer 2009). These findings are all the more remarkable given that charter schools are now two decades in the making, and in just the last year they have received substantial media attention, been the subject of a major documentary, and enjoyed the endorsement of leaders of both political parties, including key members of the Obama administration.

The affluent are especially likely to favor charter schools, with 64 percent offering their endorsement. Interestingly, the biggest jump in support for charters seems to have taken place among teachers. Those favoring the idea increased from 39 percent to 45 percent over the past year, while opposition remained unchanged.

Single-Sex Schools. Once pervasive in American education, gender-specific public schools were until quite recently a vanishing species. The notion of educating boys and girls separately, however, received a boost in 2006 with the publication of new federal regulations clarifying the legal status of single-sex schools and classrooms. The National Association for Single Sex Public Education reports that 524 public schools now offer students opportunities for single-sex education, including 103 in which students have all of their educational activities in a gender-specific setting.

Thirty-four percent of Americans support proposals that would give “parents the option of sending their child to an all-boys or all-girls school,” while only 23 percent are opposed. Opinion has not changed since the same question was last posed back in 2009. Interestingly, the well-to-do are even more favorably disposed to the idea, with no less than 47 percent giving it their support. Teachers, too, like the idea. Given the widespread support for providing families a single-sex option, it is surprising no politician has made this issue an election platform component.

Grading Public Schools

Last year we reported that the public’s evaluations of the nation’s public schools had reached an all-time low. Only 18 percent of the public was willing to give the schools an A or a B, while 27 percent said they deserved no better than a D or an F. Those evaluations were decidedly lower than the grades given by those asked by the *Phi Delta Kappa*/Gallup poll earlier in the decade, and even lower than the percentage reported by *Education Next* in 2007 (when only 22 percent gave their schools top marks).

Happily, in 2011, evaluations of public schools have ticked upward ever so modestly, with 22 percent again willing to give their schools an A or B, though 25 percent of those evaluations are still handing out either a D or F. The affluent are by far the toughest graders, with only 15 percent of them giving the nation’s schools the highest marks. Teachers, by contrast, are much more generous in their evaluations, with 37 percent saying that the nation’s schools deserve an A or B (see Figure 6).

The portrait of public satisfaction changes dramatically, however, if one inquires about Americans’ local public schools. No less than 46 percent of those surveyed give their community schools an A or a B, a slightly higher percentage than in 2007 (43 percent). The affluent, as critical as they are of the nation’s schools, are more content with their local schools than the public at large: 54 percent say their local schools deserve one of the two high grades. Teachers especially like their own community’s schools, with 64 percent of them giving out an A or a B.

Spending on Public Schools

For the United States economy, the past three years have been hard times: The country has yet to recover fully from the recession that began in 2008. Unemployment hovers around 9 percent, salary increases are hard to come by, and public treasuries are steeped in debt. The stimulus package of 2009 provided a short-term revenue fix for school districts, but those dollars, at best, barely offset sharp declines from local tax revenues. In the spring of 2011, when this survey was administered, no one thought it would be easy for school districts to balance their budgets. Under the circumstances, it would not be surprising if the public concluded that cutbacks in school expenditures were appropriate.

Not so. When the public was asked whether government funding for public schools in their district should increase, decrease, or stay the same, 59 percent selected the first option, only slightly less than the 63 percent that gave that opinion in 2010, and dramatically more than in 2009 (46 percent). Affluent respondents were less willing to spend more for their district schools, but even among them a clear majority (52 percent) preferred an increase in expenditures.

A segment of those surveyed were asked the same question except that they were first told the level of per-pupil expenditure in their community, which averaged \$12,300 for the respondents in our sample. For every subgroup considered, this single piece of information dampened public enthusiasm for increased spending. Support for more spending fell from 59 percent to 46 percent of those surveyed. Among the well-to-do, the level of support dropped dramatically, from 52 percent to 36 percent. Among teachers, support for expenditure increases fell even more sharply—from 71 percent to 53 percent (see Figure 7).

When asked about the possibility of raising taxes to fund public schools, support for greater spending dropped further still. Only 28 percent of Americans believe that local taxes to support public schools should be increased, while over half believe that they should stay the same, and 16 percent believe that they should decrease. The views of the affluent do not differ notably from the public as a whole and even among teachers only 42 percent support higher taxes.

Digital Learning

Online education has become a growth industry, as a rapidly increasing number of high school and college students are taking some of their courses over the Internet. Some, including Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christiansen, have gone so far as to predict that half of all high school courses will be taken online within a decade.

A year ago such projections seemed plausible, as public support for learning over the Internet jumped 10 points, to a total 52 percent, from where it had been the previous year. But if online learning is going to sweep the country, that percentage needs to continue to climb, and in 2011, support slipped modestly to 47 percent. Twenty-six percent of Americans now say they are opposed, up 3 percentage points over 2010 (see Figure 8).

Contrary to the standard image of the educated well-to-do as the first to adopt new technologies, the affluent were somewhat less supportive of the idea than the public as a whole. In fact, the affluent were evenly divided, with opposition as high as 43 percent. Nearly half (49 percent) of teachers also expressed approval, although that percentage was down by 6 percent from 2010.

In short, there are signs that support for online learning is reaching a political plateau, and important segments of the population—teachers and the affluent—are resistant to the idea. Yet, when respondents were asked about their own children, high levels of support for online education are observed across the American public. A majority of Americans overall, and roughly two in three teachers, expresses a willingness to have one of their children take “some academic courses” in high school over the Internet.

School and Student Accountability

Nine years after the enactment of No Child Left Behind, the public’s appetite for standardized tests appears undiminished. More than two in three Americans believe that the federal government should “continue to require that all students be tested in math and reading each year in grades 3–8 and once in high school,” whereas less than 10 percent actually oppose this requirement. Roughly three in four affluent respondents support the regular administration of tests, as do similar shares of African Americans and Hispanics. Only among teachers does there appear a nontrivial segment of the population that opposes existing testing practices. Even so, majorities of teachers support annual testing of lower-school students and a single test for high school students.

Breaking from existing law, however, Americans support the creation of a single national test in both reading and math. Under No Child Left Behind, each state develops its own test and benchmarks for determining student proficiency. Solid pluralities of both the general public and all subgroups, however, believe that there should be one test and one standard for all students across the country. Roughly one in five, by contrast, supports different tests and standards in different states. A paltry number of respondents think that all state and federal tests should be abolished.

Just as Americans support tying teacher pay to student performance on standardized tests, so too do they want students’ eligibility to be promoted from one grade to the next and to graduate from high school to depend on demonstrated success on tests. Fully 70 percent of Americans support a requirement that students pass an exam before being eligible to move on to the next grade. Another 72 percent support a requirement that students pass an exam before being allowed to receive a high school diploma. Support for student accountability, moreover, runs deep across all the subgroups we analyze, including teachers. Sixty percent of teachers support the idea of tying grade promotion to test performance, while 66 percent support high school graduation exams, even as these same teachers overwhelmingly oppose the idea of linking their own remuneration to student test scores.

That Americans want students to be tested, however, does not mean that they are convinced that current testing provides accurate information about school quality. Indeed, only 7 percent of Americans claim that their state's standardized test provides "excellent" information about the schools in their state, and only 34 percent claim that it provides "good" information. Forty-seven percent, however, believe that the test provides either "fair" or "poor" information. With just one exception, all of the subgroups follow national trends on this question. As their responses to other questions about testing might indicate, teachers hold standardized tests in the lowest regard. Only one in four teachers claims that the state's standardized tests offer excellent or good information about the quality of schools, compared to the 69 percent who believe that the information is either fair or poor.

Conflicts with Teachers Likely to Persist

We have discussed only a few highlights from this year's survey. The reader can glean much more information by taking a careful look at the survey questions and responses, available on the *Education Next* web site. Here we draw only three broad conclusions:

On many questions of education policy, opinion has not changed materially over the past year, despite the headline news coming from Wisconsin and elsewhere. We are not the first to have documented stability in the policy positions taken by members of the American public. Only when external events require a rethinking of their position are they inclined to alter their views. For that reason, we find it to be of some significance that over the course of the past year the public has become much more supportive of school vouchers.

On most questions of public policy, differences between the affluent and the public at large are on the margins. In no case did we find the well-to-do favoring a policy that the general public opposed. Instead, those with ample resources tend to be even more supportive of the positions that were taken by a plurality of the public. Our data do not allow us to discern whether the affluent are leading or following public opinion more generally, but the findings do suggest a general synchronization of viewpoints. Still, it is the case the affluent are more skeptical of online learning and more satisfied with their local schools than is the general public.

Finally, we find that a majority of teachers often takes positions contrary to those of a plurality of both the public and the affluent on key issues such as teachers unions, the rights and prerogatives of teachers, and school vouchers. Plainly, the battles over school reform are far from over.

William G. Howell is professor of American politics at the University of Chicago. Martin R. West is assistant professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and deputy director of Harvard's Program on Education Policy and Governance. Paul E. Peterson is the director of Harvard's Program on Education Policy and Governance and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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Are 82% of Schools 'Failing' Under NCLB, as Duncan Warned?

Education Week

By Michele McNeil

August 3, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/08/are_82_of_schools_failing_unde.html

States are beginning to report the results from their 2010-11 standardized tests, which means we're learning how many schools are not making "adequate yearly progress" under No Child Left Behind.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, as part of his campaign to get Congress to rewrite the law, [issued dire warnings](#) that 82 percent of schools would be labeled "failing" this year, when many of them may not deserve that label. He used this draconian number to illustrate how NCLB is "broken," since it sets an unrealistic deadline that 100 percent of students be proficient in math and reading by 2014. But many people were [skeptical](#) that the number would actually be so high this year. Education policy wonks called the department's P.R. move "misleading" and not "responsible."

Was Duncan right?

So far, most states that have released their results aren't coming close to his 82 percent number. In fact, many of the individual states' press releases refer to Duncan's estimate to put a better spin on their own test scores. States set their own benchmarks, but they must steadily increase toward that 100 percent goal. Indeed, many states are [asking for relief](#) from such perfect expectations.

Together with my colleagues Amy Wickner and Kay Dorko, who work in the *EdWeek* library, we did a quick survey of all states to see if they've reported AYP results, and if so, what their failure rate is. This is obviously very unscientific, but it will give you an idea of just how AYP is affecting schools. Schools that fail to make AYP face an escalating set of sanctions, and that's why the rising number is so worrisome.

We're still waiting on AYP data from some big states—including California, New York, Illinois, and Texas—whose results could paint a very different picture. High failure rates in those states could definitely make Duncan's prediction more realistic.

States that are not listed below have not released their AYP data yet. (Or, at least we couldn't find it.) If your state has released AYP data and is not on this list, please leave a comment to that effect. Here's the state-by-state listing we've gathered so far of the percentage of schools that failed to make AYP:

Alabama: [28 percent](#)

Arizona: [42 percent](#)

District of Columbia: [72 percent](#)

Florida: [89 percent](#)

Georgia: [37 percent](#)

Hawaii: [62 percent](#)

Idaho: [38 percent](#)

Maine: [56 percent](#)

Maryland: [45 percent](#)

New Hampshire: [72 percent](#)

New Jersey: [50 percent](#)

New Mexico: [87 percent](#)

Oregon: [46 percent](#)

Rhode Island: [20 percent](#)

South Carolina: [76 percent](#)

South Dakota: [20 percent](#)

Tennessee: [49.5 percent](#)

Vermont: [72 percent](#)

Virginia: [38 percent](#)

Wisconsin: [11 percent](#)

Wyoming: [29 percent](#)

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Cheating Scandals Intensify Focus on Test Pressures

Education Week

By: Christina A. Samuels

August 4, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/04/37cheating_ep.h30.html?tkn=MYSFVSNU86cuoLf/Yu3dooHWL5YiMSqxn6u2&cmp=clp-edweek

The cheating scandal that has rocked the 48,000-student Atlanta school system was an egregious, but not entirely unexpected, byproduct of testing accountability pressures, many testing experts say.

The reason: As long as test scores are used in any field to make decisions on rewards or punishments, including for schools or educators, a small percentage of people will be willing to bend the rules—or break them.

But the allegations of systematic test alteration by teachers and principals in Atlanta, along with recent accusations of cheating in Baltimore, the District of Columbia, Philadelphia and other districts, have highlighted a split between those arguing for improved test management and security and those who ask if it's better to scrap high-stakes testing altogether.

Yong Zhao, the associate dean for global education at the University of Oregon, in Eugene, used the Atlanta situation as a jumping-off point for a [five-part series](#) in his blog Zhao Learning. The United States should “ditch testing,” he believes.

In an interview, he said that the country should move to a portfolio-based assessment system that measures students in several areas.

“You can't fix this by changing internal security,” Mr. Zhao said. “If the stakes are so high that the teachers don't even believe the measurement itself, they're going to try to cheat.”

In contrast, Gregory J. Cizek, a professor of educational measurement and evaluation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who assisted state investigators in their Atlanta probe, said that no one suggests getting rid of sports just because

some athletes cheat. In his view, tests produce high-quality information that educators need to make good decisions. "Blaming tests or accountability systems for things we don't like is a dumb idea. Like banning thermometers for revealing fevers," Mr. Cizek wrote in an opinion essay for *Education Week's* website. ("[Cheating on Tests and Other Dumb Ideas.](#)" July 25, 2011.)

"Tests are a measure of student achievement," Mr. Cizek added in an interview. "It's difficult to imagine any measurement system that doesn't take into account student achievement," he said.

Test Value

Nationally, there appears to be no move to lessen the importance of test-based accountability.

Standardized tests remain at the heart of determining whether schools and districts make adequate yearly progress in raising student achievement under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The tests are also being used to develop "value added" measures that will gauge an individual educator's effect on a student learning. And two state assessment consortia have received federal funds to design tests for the new common-core academic standards adopted by all but five states.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said that he was "stunned" by the results of the Atlanta investigation, but stressed that other schools and districts across the country are making genuine progress without cheating.

In a July 6 interview with an Atlanta-area television station, Mr. Duncan said that the situation in that city stood out because of the "clearly systemic" nature of the apparent cheating.

"There's never been anything like it, and we hope there never is again," he told Channel 11, the city's NBC affiliate.

How Common Is Cheating?

Statistical analysis of the prevalence of teacher- or administrator-led cheating appears to bear out the belief that such misconduct involves a small minority. In 2003, economics professors Brian A. Jacob, of the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, and Steven D. Levitt, at the University of Chicago, [analyzed the test scores](#) of every Chicago 3rd through 8th grader who took the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in 1993 through 2000. They detected evidence of "serious" cheating in 4 percent to 5 percent of their sample.

In Arizona, professors at Arizona State University, in Phoenix, conducted [a survey](#) last year of 3,000 teachers, which found that 10 percent reported that they knew of colleagues who had engaged in the most egregious forms of cheating, such as changing answer sheets or somehow preventing low-performing students from taking the tests.

But even though such activity is believed to be relatively rare, it is hardly unknown. And it can sometimes affect the test results of hundreds, or thousands, of students at a time and cast doubt on claims of improvement in achievement.

In 1999, the chief investigator for the New York City schools released a [70-page report](#) that alleged 32 schools in all five boroughs had engaged in teacher- or administrator-led cheating. The language of that report, written by a team led by the late Edward F. Stancik, strikes a tone remarkably similar to that of the Atlanta report.

New York students allegedly were coached to the right answers on the citywide tests, or prepared for the tests using actual questions and answers from the exams. At that time, the cheating scandal was called one of the nation's largest.

"When cheating occurred, it rendered the use of standardized tests as a diagnostic tool—to evaluate not only student performance, but educator performance as well—meaningless," the report concluded. The United Federation of Teachers, which represents the city's teaching force, commissioned its own scathing review, saying that Mr. Stancik's work had overstated the problem.

In another case, the increased academic performance under then-Gov. George W. Bush that was often called the "Texas miracle" burnished Mr. Bush's record for his 2000 presidential campaign. He often noted the nearly six straight years of gains in test scores among students, particularly minorities, during his state tenure, from 1995 to 2000.

The Texas testing policy went on to become the foundation of the testing policy created in the No Child Left Behind law and brought Rod Paige, the former Houston superintendent, to Washington as Mr. Bush's first education secretary.

But those scores in some districts were tainted after newspaper and state investigations revealed gains in some schools that were improbably large. A later state investigation found one Houston school that falsified dropout data.

Fighting the Problem

Scholars often say such cheating incidents are examples of "Campbell's law" at work. Donald T. Campbell, a social scientist, wrote in the 1970s that "the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decisionmaking, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor."

In other words, the more important test scores become, the more likely it is that test scores will end up corrupted.

In the debate over testing, however, school officials are focused more on trying to fix the testing system than on upending it.

James A. Wollack, a professor of educational psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an expert in test security, says that testing systems would benefit from impartial investigators who would independently investigate cheating allegations.

"You really do need someone who's impartial, who doesn't have friends in the school system, and who doesn't have friends in the governor's office," he said. The state investigation in Atlanta stands among similar probes of cheating incidents because of the involvement of dozens of agents from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Georgia has also been taking steps to combat potential cheating by sending monitors from the state education department to schools around the state that have been flagged in the prior year as having high numbers of test-sheet erasures, said Matt Cardoza, the director of communications for the department. The state has done that for the past two years, and it has seen a drop in scores among some schools that were previously high performers, he said.

Having outside monitors, Mr. Cardoza said, will "slow down that unethical behavior."

New York state has decided to combat cheating among teachers, administrators, and students by forming a board that will offer recommendations by the beginning of the 2012-13 school year. The board will review of all aspects of the state's testing system, said a spokesman for the New York education department.

But Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, an associate professor of education at Arizona State and the lead author of the study that

surveyed teachers on cheating prevalence, recommends focusing on other practices that harm the validity of tests, such as the behavior she says she engaged in during her time as a classroom math teacher.

Ms. Amrein-Beardsley said she never altered a student's answer sheet, or encouraged low-performing students to stay home on test day. However, she would get copies of the state tests before they were administered, change the details and numbers of word problems, and then use those slightly altered questions to drill her students, she said. She was so successful, she said, that she was asked to be her district's test coordinator.

Some might call such work savvy test preparation. Ms. Amrein-Beardsley said she looks back on it and believes it was a form of cheating that narrowed classroom instruction to a few items that would be measured on a test. Her survey found those kinds of actions far more prevalent than actively changing test sheets.

"Teaching to the test is still third-degree [cheating] in my mind," she said.

Library Intern Amy Wickner contributed to this article.

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FLORIDA NEWS

Tying FCAT to dollars is temptation to cheat

Miami Herald

By: Fred Grimm

August 3, 2011

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/08/03/2344171/tying-fcat-to-dollars-is-temptation.html#ixzz1U3vzbAuQ>

In the great Atlanta test scandal, educators cheated mostly on behalf of institutions. Teachers, under intense pressure from principals, altered student scores on statewide standardized tests to save their struggling schools from ignominy and to bring a little glory to their bosses.

"Unreasonable pressure," as the Georgia Office of Special Investigators put it, to achieve "unreasonable targets," led to a stunning ethical breakdown in the Atlanta schools system. The 10-month investigation, released in July, found educators had altered test scores at 44 schools in 2009. Investigators determined that 178 teachers and principals cheated.

These findings weren't based on mere statistical anomalies, such as the unusual rate of erasures on this year's FCAT test sheets that raised suspicions in 14 Florida school districts. Outright confessions were extracted from 82 educators in Atlanta. Six principals invoked the Fifth Amendment.

Atlanta teachers who had been reluctant to go along with the conspiracies faced "a culture of fear, intimidation and retaliation." But the report found that very little of the cheating there could be attributed to what investigators called "monetary incentives" for the individual teachers.

Merit pay, in 2009, wasn't a factor. Not yet.

New laws in both Georgia and Florida now tie standardized test results to both teacher pay raises and teacher retention.

Hypothetical income differences under Florida's new merit pay law range from \$41,000 a year for a school teacher burdened with a class full of knuckleheads, up to \$76,000, even \$100,000 by some calculations, if their onetime dummies ace those FCATs.

Merit raises (the only raises permissible under the new Florida law) will ratchet up the temptation, warned Arizona State University professor Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, who has spent years studying the unintended consequences of high-stakes student testing. She said Wednesday that "it's pretty clear" that the more consequences states tie to the outcome of the standardized tests, particularly merit pay or cash bonuses, the more cheating we're likely to see.

Amrein-Beardsley led a team that surveyed 3,000 Arizona teachers. In her study, published last year, more than half admitted to manipulating the test scores on the Arizona standardized tests.

Meanwhile, an investigation by USA Today found improvements in standardized test scores too good to be true in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Michigan and Ohio. Reporters at the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Detroit Free Press and Los Angeles Times made similar findings in their respective regions. (Three years of tough-minded reporting by the Atlanta Constitution led to the Georgia investigation.)

But Amrein-Beardsley's definition of cheating entails more than the blatant stuff uncovered in Atlanta, where teachers would erase the marks inside the bubbles on test sheets and pencil in the correct answers. She talked Wednesday of more subtle tactics. Like teachers, patrolling the room during tests, coaching students or hinting when they've made mistakes. Or leaving learning aids visible in the classroom during tests.

More subtle yet, she said, would be the narrowing of the teaching curriculum to only subjects likely to be broached on those all-important money-laden standardized tests and ignoring everything else. From teaching to the test to teaching only to the test.

Amrein-Beardsley expects to see teachers and principals manipulating student enrollments to get rid of slow or disruptive students. She cited an Atlanta school several years ago that jettisoned 80 poor-performing kids who would have dragged down standardized test scores.

Now a monetary reward for good results, or the possibility of getting fired for bad results, will be tied to the tests. "The higher the consequences, the more expulsions," she predicted.

Most teachers don't cheat, of course. But FCAT has already warped school curriculums, brought about an epidemic of "teaching to the test," and created, occasionally, very suspicious test results among some formerly dullard students. Now all those old temptations come attached to dollar signs

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Gerard Robinson is on the job

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

August 3, 2011

[http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2011/08/gerard-robinson-is-on-the-job-as-fls-new-education-commissioner.html?](http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2011/08/gerard-robinson-is-on-the-job-as-fls-new-education-commissioner.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29)

[utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29](http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2011/08/gerard-robinson-is-on-the-job-as-fls-new-education-commissioner.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29)

Gerard Robinson, hired away from Virginia, this week officially became Florida's new education commissioner.

Robinson is making \$275,000 a year — the same as his predecessor, Eric Smith — and can take up to 176 hours of annual leave, according to the employment letter sent to him by Kathleen Shanahan, chairman of the State Board of Education.

You can read Shanahan's letter here:[Gerard Robinson ltr](#)

She ends by telling Robinson that both Gov. Rick Scott and her fellow board members say, "welcome to Florida, and let's get to work."

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STATE NEWS

Their View: Fulfilling promise, avoiding pitfalls, of virtual learning in New Mexico

Las Cruces Sun-News

By: Lance T. Izumi and Vicki (Murray) Alger

August 2, 2011

http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-opinion/ci_18598058

Expanding virtual learning opportunities is a critically important step for New Mexico. Virtual schooling was a critical component of the "Florida Model" for education reform, which helped transform achievement across student sub-groups there from nearly worst to first within a decade. The Florida Reform model has since been adopted by Gov. Susana Martinez — with good reason.

Academic outcomes indicate the state's traditional schooling system is not up to the task. New Mexico ranks 49th in fourth-grade reading proficiency; 48th in eighth-grade math proficiency; and 50th in graduation rates. Poor funding does not explain such poor performance.

Per-pupil education spending has increased 54 percent faster than the rate of inflation since 1991-92. With a \$400 million budget deficit, such performance is no longer tenable — and state policymakers know it.

New Mexico has already taken nationally recognized strides to transform the provision of high-quality, cost-effective education to a diverse and growing population of students through virtual education. In particular, this includes the award-winning Innovative Digital Education and Learning New Mexico (IDEAL-NM) program. The results are impressive.

Rural school district superintendents report a 96 percent passing among students taking hundreds of online courses.

Statewide, IDEAL-NM students have a pass rate that is higher than 95 percent in credit-recovery courses and advancement courses. These results have helped increase the statewide graduation rate 11.4 percent over the last two years.

The challenge now is fostering a competitive online learning landscape to promote continuous improvement, innovation, and efficiency among a variety of online education programs — not just state-led initiatives. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools documents only six charter schools that include virtual education components in New Mexico, even though applications for such charter schools are on the rise. Moreover, as of the fall of 2010 the New Mexico Public Education Department had not approved a single application for full-time, multi-district virtual schools.

Policymakers should monitor this state of affairs to ensure public - and private-sector providers — have the opportunity to serve students. They can begin by following five promising practices used in other states and abroad.

First, fund for success using a student-centered, results-based financing structure. Funding follows students to the virtual schools of their choice, and schools receive funding only after students successfully master their course material.

Next, implement expansive enrollment policies that do not cap the number of students who may enroll in virtual schools part- or full-time. It makes no sense to stifle successful programs; and unsuccessful programs will suffer natural attrition as parents enroll their children elsewhere.

Third, eliminate rigid teacher certification mandates and allow full teacher licensure reciprocity to maximize students' access to the teachers that are best for them. Talented individuals with advanced degrees or industry-specific skills should not be barred from teaching. Likewise, students should not be denied access to top quality educators simply because their licenses are from out of state.

Fourth, eliminate anachronistic regulations including class-size mandates, compulsory education codes, and seat-time requirements. Inflexible mandates are symptomatic of a system-centered approach to schooling that puts virtual schools at a disadvantage because they are structured around students' mastery of subject material. Since virtual schools also do not have the geographical or time constraints of bricks-and-mortar schools, such mandates are unnecessary obstacles to student-centered, individualized learning.

Finally, protect parents' rights as educators by exempting them from state licensing requirements. A high level of parental involvement is vital for virtual learning to succeed because parents oversee course assignments, check home work, and supervise their children's progress. Some national teachers union leaders consider these activities "an excess of parent involvement," and at least one state teachers union affiliate sued-unsuccessfully-to limit parents' roles as educators.

The opportunities online schooling offers, including transformed incentives for schools and teachers to meet students' unique, individual learning needs, have made the expansion of virtual education a cornerstone reform across the country and the world. Now is the time for New Mexico to expand on its successes and lead the way.

Lance T. Izumi, J.D., is a Koret Senior Fellow in Education Studies and Senior Director, Education Studies, at the Pacific Research Institute in Sacramento, Calif. Vicki (Murray) Alger, Ph.D., is PRI Education Studies Senior Policy Fellow. Izumi and Murray are co-authors of the new Rio Grande Foundation report, "Enchanted Future: The Promise of Virtual Education in New Mexico," available at www.riograndefoundation.org/.

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Oregon Teacher Prep Programs Defend Their Choice of Mentors

The Oregonian

By: Betsy Hammond

August 3, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2011/08/03/37mct_ormentors.h30.html?tkn=ZLYF2XxNCi7bvWbVgstO7EOHCM7LiRMKowki&cmp=clp-edweek

A new national study highly critical of schools of education, including two in Oregon, has called attention to a group of people who typically don't get much: teachers who agree to take on a student teacher.

Why would seasoned pros let novices take over their classroom and influence the results they achieve with students? And are these mentors well-suited to shape the next generation of teachers?

The National Council for Teacher Quality's report, "[Student Teaching in the United States.](#)" suggests the answer to the second question is no.

The council blames schools of education, saying most do little or nothing to ensure that the teachers who mentor student teachers are exceptional at the craft and well-equipped to mentor a fellow adult.

But Oregon colleges of education are pushing back against the report's conclusions, particularly its assertion that Oregon programs offer weak student teaching experiences with so-so mentors.

Leaders of Oregon teacher preparation programs say they take numerous steps to make certain the teachers who mentor their students, known as "cooperating teachers," are just that: great at getting results with kids and great at helping an aspiring teacher learn the ropes.

"When we seek cooperating teachers, that's where we start (when talking to principals): 'Who do you have who is an exemplary person doing a great job in the classroom?' It's a fundamental part of our conversation," says Michael Jaeger, dean of the college of education at Eastern Oregon University. "And if you're a great teacher, but you can't mentor, we don't want you."

During 2008-09, the most recent year for which figures are available, the 20 Oregon colleges and universities that prepare teachers had to find more than 3,200 teachers willing to accept a student teacher.

One of them was Michelle Lacaden, a language arts and social studies teacher at Portland's West Sylvan Middle School. She has served as the cooperating teacher for 15 student teachers so far.

Extra Work

It takes hours of extra work to coach college students on classroom management, review their lesson plans and share tips of the trade. But, she says, it's extremely satisfying to help launch new teachers into the profession the only way they'll really learn it—by practicing in a real classroom with real students.

"Turning over your class to an inexperienced teacher can be potentially a scary thing," Lacaden said. "You have to have a lot of faith and you have to be very, very involved. But I feel it's worth it."

In the national study, council researchers looked for written evidence that its sample of schools of education nationwide, including at Eastern in La Grande and Linfield College in McMinnville, met five standards.

Among them: The teacher preparation program, not the school, selects the cooperating teacher; all cooperating teachers show

evidence their pupils make large academic gains; and cooperating teachers possess the skills needed to mentor an adult. Using that standard, the study rates Linfield's student teacher program as weak and Eastern's as poor. Leaders of both programs blasted those ratings as inaccurate. They say their faculty rely on close, face-to-face relationships with principals in their area—not formal letters or written policies—to communicate the traits they seek in mentor teachers and ensure their students are placed with top-notch veterans. In addition, university supervisors visit the classroom many times during each student teacher's placement and see for themselves whether the cooperating teacher is doing a good job. "We ask principals to nominate the very, very best teachers," said Steven Bernhisel, chairman of the education department at Linfield. "Our faculty are quite familiar with the principals and teachers in our area, and we work to make sure the teachers our students are matched with are outstanding."

Finding Placements

Keith Menk, deputy director of the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, acknowledges that getting teachers to agree to accept a student teacher is harder than it used to be, largely because teachers are under such pressure to raise test scores.

As a result, he says, school districts in Oregon and elsewhere are insisting they be in the driver's seat when it comes to deciding whether a teacher can serve as a cooperating teacher and how often.

"It's a struggle to find enough placements," Menk said. Still, he said, "districts will not place a student teacher with an educator they feel is a marginal performer."

Linda Mihata, who retired last month as head of Lakeridge High's English department, agreed to serve as cooperating teacher for five or so student teachers during her career. She said she had numerous motives—to gain a second adult in the classroom, to learn from someone with fresh training, to free herself from teaching duties during the weeks the student teacher took over. But the biggest reason, she said, was to give back to the profession she loves and help provide a skillful model for the next wave of teachers.

"It takes a good deal of time to communicate all the systems you have worked out over time for keeping track of papers, communicating with parents, managing behavior," Mihata said. "You advise them before school, during prep time, after school, on weekends. With a student teacher, you just stay late.

"But there is a payoff," she said, "when it comes time for your student to take over your classroom. It gave me some time to do some reading, do some of my own research. For teachers, that's a huge bonus. We never have any time."

At Lakeridge, she said, the question is less about whether the classroom teacher is equipped to be a mentor than whether the student teacher is up to the job. All who get chosen go through an in-person interview to make sure they have the commitment necessary to meet student and parent expectations.

"We want to make sure the quality is maintained in the classroom, even with a student teacher," Mihata said.

Still, the Lakeridge English department makes sure one strong teacher mentors a student teacher every year, she said. "The continuance of high-quality people in the classroom depends on the models we provide and should provide."

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Nevada: Clark County School District put on No Child Left Behind watch list

Las Vegas Sun

By: Paul Takahashi

August 3, 2011

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2011/aug/03/school-district-put-watch-list/>

The Clark County School District has been placed on a watch list as more schools failed to show enough improvement in test scores, officials said Wednesday.

The School District fell short of making "adequate yearly progress" under the federal No Child Left Behind two of the past three years. The district had made adequate progress in improving test scores last year, but failed to make progress in 2009.

Adequate yearly progress is a measure of school improvement under 2001's No Child Left Behind. Public schools receiving federal funding must hit annual targets to bring students up to 100 percent academic proficiency in math and reading by the end of the 2013-14 school year.

This year, schools were supposed to reach 66 percent proficiency in math and 64 percent in reading.

Of the 363 schools in Clark County, 224 (61 percent) did not make adequate progress this year. The number of schools failing to show progress increased by nine from last year.

Under No Child Left Behind, schools have to demonstrate achievement in 45 categories, such as graduation rates, socioeconomic status and academic achievement among students broken down by ethnicity, special education status, limited English proficiency and those qualifying for free and reduced-price meals.

Failure to show improvement on any one of the categories results in not making "adequate yearly progress." This all-or-nothing policy has become a source of frustration for educators, School Board members said.

District officials attributed its lack of adequate progress to [higher testing standards](#) in reading, which lowered test scores this year by up to 30 percentage points.

Adequate progress may become more elusive over the next two years, as the School District starts using a higher testing standard in math and a more accurate way to [measure graduation rates](#), which might lower its rates by 15 percent or more.

As standards rise, more and more schools across the country may be [classified as failing](#) under No Child Left Behind. Pressure to meet standards has been blamed for high-profile cheating investigations in Atlanta and Washington, D.C.

Many education leaders — including Education Secretary Arne Duncan — have said meeting a 100 percent proficiency goal in math and reading by 2014 is unrealistic, calling for reforms to the law. Some states are beginning to ask for waivers to skirt the goal, pending the law's reauthorization, and at least three states have vowed to just [ignore meeting federal benchmarks](#).

This month, Nevada will implement a new standard to measure academic progress called the growth model, which will measure each student's growth instead of focusing on an annual test score. Nevada joins 18 other states using the model, including Colorado, where Superintendent Dwight Jones helped spearhead the model's development.

"We see the growth model as the wave of the future," said Pedro Martinez, the deputy superintendent of instruction. "Annual Yearly Progress is a one-year measure, and it's either you did it, or you didn't. The growth model is a much more comprehensive measure."

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