

**From:** Sarah Powell (Sarah@afloridapromise.org) <sarah@afloridapromise.org>  
**To:** Undisclosed recipients:  
**CC:**  
**Date:** Tue, 3/6/2012 10:59:04 AM  
**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 03/06/12

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 03/06/12

For more education news, visit *The Ed Fly* at [www.TheEdFly.com](http://www.TheEdFly.com).

### NATIONAL NEWS

- 1) [Civil Rights Data Show Retention Disparities](#); Adams, Robelen, and Shah – Education Week
- 2) [When It Comes to Testing, Is Santorum Like Romney?](#), Klein – Education Week
- 3) [South by Southwest: Pearson Showcasing iBooks and Digital Classroom](#); Walton - WebProNews
- 4) [In Age of Tweets, Teachers Hammer the Grammar](#); Pytak – Republican & Herald

### STATE NEWS

- 5) [Opinion: All students could access high-quality education](#); Finn – Richmond Times-Dispatch
- 6) [New Jersey Senate Education Committee discusses tenure reform bill's nuts and bolts](#); Rundquist – The New Jersey Star-Ledger
- 7) [Iowans flock to House to weigh in on school reforms](#); Noble and Clayworth – Des Moines Register
- 8) [N.C. Students may get chance to rate teachers](#); Helms – The Charlotte Observer

## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Civil Rights Data Show Retention Disparities**

Education Week

By: Caralee J. Adams, Erik W. Robelen, and Nirvi Shah

March 6, 2012

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/07/23data\\_ep.h31.html?tkn=RNRFPtPlviHSEInUrVg%2BbNsoHrUv6d7QWbPa&cmp=clp-edweek&utm\\_source=fb&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=mrss](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/07/23data_ep.h31.html?tkn=RNRFPtPlviHSEInUrVg%2BbNsoHrUv6d7QWbPa&cmp=clp-edweek&utm_source=fb&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=mrss)

New nationwide data collected by the [U.S. Department of Education's civil rights office](#) reveal stark racial and ethnic disparities in student retentions, with black and Hispanic students far more likely than white students to repeat a grade, especially in elementary and middle school.

The contrast is especially strong for African-Americans. In the most extreme case, more than half of all 4th graders retained at the end of the 2009-10 academic year—56 percent—were black, according to the data, which account for about 85 percent of the nation's public school population. In 3rd grade, 49 percent of those held back were black.

Those findings come even though African-American students represented less than one-fifth of the entire universe of students in the K-12 data set collected from districts.

In all, nearly 1 million students, or 2.3 percent of those enrolled, were retained across K-12, the data show. Black students were nearly three times as likely as white students to be retained, when combining all grade levels. Hispanic students were twice as likely to be held back.

The new [Civil Rights Data Collection](#), a portion of which was provided to *Education Week* last week, was scheduled for public release on March 6. Collected from nearly 7,000 school districts, the data are part of an ongoing information-collection effort by the agency's office for civil rights. In this latest round, the agency significantly expanded the type of information gathered, for the first time collecting school-by-school retention data. Several experts said they were not aware of any such national data previously being made available.

Such racial disparities are prevalent in other parts of the K-12 system as well. According to Education Department analysis of other civil rights data it also unveiled today, black and Hispanic students face disproportionate levels of discipline—more than 70 percent of students arrested or referred to law enforcement were Hispanic or black, as one example. Black students were 3 ½ times more likely to be expelled than their white peers. And while black students represented 21 percent of students with disabilities in the data analyzed, they represented 44 percent of students who were subjected to mechanical restraint.

Federal analysis of the OCR data also reveals that minority students have less access to experienced teachers. Schools in the survey serving the highest proportion of these students were nearly twice as likely to employ teachers with only one or two years

experience as schools serving mostly white students.

"We are not alleging overt discrimination. These are long held patterns of behavior. Many educators may not even be aware of these discrepancies," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in a call with reporters on Monday. He acknowledged that even the school district he led from 2001 to 2008—Chicago Public Schools—had some troubling inequities around student discipline uncovered by the new data. He said, in general, "For far too many students in too many schools ... inequity remains the reality."

Experts were quick to note that although the racial and ethnic disparities in retention are alarming, they are generally consistent with an abundance of prior research at the state and local levels, and have a strong correlation to achievement gaps in the United States.

"In a way, it's hammering home the intersection of race and poverty," said Robert Balfanz, the director of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore. Even so, Mr. Balfanz said he was "somewhat surprised by the magnitude" of the racial gap for black students in the mid-to-upper-elementary grades.

Another area of the federal data examined by *Education Week* was coursetaking and passing rates in Algebra 1. Here, the data suggest that disproportionately low numbers of black 7th and 8th graders take introductory algebra.

Meanwhile, about one-quarter of all 9th and 10th graders failed algebra, the data show, with higher failure rates for black and Hispanic students than for whites and Asians.

Several researchers urged caution in interpreting algebra pass-fail rates, noting that the rigor of algebra courses varies widely and that some schools may be overly generous in giving a passing grade.

### **'We Need to Know Why'**

Since 1968, the Education Department's office for civil rights—charged with protecting students of different races, disabilities, genders, and English-speaking abilities from discrimination—has gathered data from schools and districts.

The most recent data-collection undertaking, for the 2009-10 school year, is the most ambitious to date, including 6,835 school districts, more than 72,000 schools, and more than 42 million public school students. It encompasses about half of the nation's districts, including a substantial proportion of districts with fewer students, including many rural districts.

To paint a picture of educational opportunities and equity, schools and districts are asked dozens of questions, from information on enrollment to access to Advanced Placement classes and incidents of harassment and bullying. Questions about retention and algebra were asked for the first time as part of the latest effort.

Russlynn Ali, the Education Department's assistant secretary for civil rights, said in an email that while offices across the federal agency use the data, they are particularly useful when the "OCR provides technical assistance to school districts on civil rights obligations, because our training can be more targeted to the particular needs of the district."

She said the department, which provided some of the raw data to *Education Week*, hopes parents, community members, and others use the data to monitor schools and address areas of concern before they become major problems.

"The latest [OCR] data show, among other things, disparities in college- and career-readiness, administration of discipline, and teacher resources," she said.

In the next round of data collection, for the 2011-12 school year, the OCR is planning to gather information from all districts nationwide.

Across all grade levels, the data show disparities in retention by race and ethnicity. The highest rate was for black students, at 4.2 percent—or nearly 318,000 students—followed by Hispanics at 2.9 percent and American Indians, at 1.9 percent. For whites, the figure was 1.5 percent, or about 317,000 students.

Retention is a controversial issue among educators and policymakers. Some states, including Florida, Louisiana, and Texas, have policies in place to retain students at particular grade levels, tying it to students' performance on standardized tests.

Most experts seem to agree that retention alone can create difficulties for students, including a greater likelihood of dropping out of school. At the same time, some recent research has suggested that a carefully crafted retention policy, coupled with early interventions and supports for those who struggle, may help improve student achievement.

Daria Hall, the director of K-12 policy for the [Education Trust](#), a Washington-based research and advocacy group, said it's vital to ask what happens to those students retained.

"Are they being put back into the exact same classroom with the same instruction that wasn't successful the first time?" she said.

All too often, she said, students don't get the extra help they need.

"They are maybe getting it louder and slower," she said.

The OCR's retention data show some sharp distinctions among student subgroups, most pronounced in the elementary and middle grades.

From grades 3-10, black students represented the largest single racial or ethnic group held back. In 4th grade, they represented more than half of all students retained, and the rates were still high in some other grades. In 5th grade, 44 percent were black, and in 6th grade, 48 percent. In 8th grade, black students were 42 percent of all those retained. No grade-by-grade enrollment data were available.

"The point is that these kids are being retained out of all proportion, and we need to know why," said Craig D. Jerald, an education consultant. "We can hypothesize. For example, do states with higher black enrollments have tougher retention policies? Is it due to some bias in how retention policies are being applied? Of course, it might be some fundamental educational issue like opportunity to master reading skills by 3rd grade."

He added, "You have to understand what's driving it so you can apply appropriate solutions."

Hispanic retention rates also appeared to be disproportionately high relative to the student population in some, but not all, grade levels. In 1st grade, 39 percent of the students retained were Hispanic, the OCR data show, and at 2nd grade, 43 percent. In grade 4, however, the proportion appeared more even: 23 percent of those retained were Hispanic. Hispanics represented about 24 percent of all K-12 students in the data set.

Ms. Ali said the retention information collected "reveals problems that should concern everybody. Retention means children are not learning, and it leads to higher dropout rates."

But, she added, "a disparity by itself does not constitute a civil rights violation."

### ***Other Research***

National data have long pointed to significant achievement gaps across racial and ethnic lines, even as those gaps have closed somewhat over time. For example, about half of black and Hispanic students scored below the "basic" level in 4th grade reading, based on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress, compared with 22 percent of white students.

Julie Marsh, a visiting associate professor of education at the University of Southern California, said the racial disparities in the retention data are deeply troubling, but shouldn't come as a big surprise.

"It's not inconsistent with past research on retention," said Ms. Marsh, who also is an adjunct fellow at the Santa Monica, Calif.-based RAND Corp.

The Texas Education Agency recently reported, for instance, based on the 2009-10 school year, that in grades 2-5 and 8-12, African-American and Hispanic students were at least twice as likely to be retained as white students.

A recent literature review by RAND identified a variety of student characteristics associated with retention, including not only prior achievement but also family background, such as income levels and parent educational levels.

At the secondary school level, the OCR data show that overall retention rates balloon, rising from about 38,000 students at 8th grade to 251,000 in the 9th grade, far more than any earlier grade. In grade 10, the figure is 180,000.

Experts say the 9th grade bump isn't surprising.

"We've always seen the highest retention rates among 9th graders," said Mr. Jerald. "A lot of students enter high school completely unprepared, so 9th grade is a very difficult transition year. ... When students arrive in high school, they're expected to take a lot more personal responsibility for their learning than in middle school."

Experts also note that the issue of earning sufficient credits to graduate starts to come into play, and that if students are far behind, they may repeat the grade.

The racial contrasts in retention rates appear to relax, but not disappear, in high school. Among 9th graders retained, 35 percent were black students, compared with 31 percent Hispanic and 31 percent white. By 12th grade, in fact, 40 percent of the retained students were white, compared with 25 percent black and 31 percent Hispanic.

Some experts say one reason for that change may be that black and Hispanic students drop out of high school at disproportionate rates.

### ***States' Retention Policies***

*Education Week* also analyzed retention data for five of the most populous states: California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas.

Florida's figures for 3rd graders dwarfed the others, even though its total K-12 population is far smaller than that of California and

Texas. It's important to note, however, that the state for about a decade has had a [retention policy](#) tied to performance on the reading portion of a state assessment. In all, the data show 8,790 Florida students reported as being held back in the schools surveyed. By comparison, 3,825 students were retained in Texas; 1,930 in Illinois; 1,070 in California; and 355 in New York, according to the OCR data.

About half of all Florida students retained were black, though African-Americans were only about 24 percent of the entire K-12 population reported to the OCR.

Jaryn Emhof, the communications director for the Foundation for Excellence in Education, led by former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, said the state's retention policy has been coupled with a variety of early interventions as well as other measures to ensure students who are held back get plenty of extra help.

"Not all retention is created equal," she said, adding that it's important not to look simply at retention data but also academic outcomes. And here she points to improvements in reading scores on state tests and NAEP. On the 4th grade reading NAEP, Florida has seen big gains over the past decade, though scores at the 8th grade have been flat.

Ms. Emhof also notes that Florida's 3rd grade retention rate has declined sharply over time.

In Illinois, virtually all 3rd graders retained were black or Hispanic, with about four-fifths African-American. Eighty-two percent of 3rd graders retained were black and 18 percent Hispanic. (Almost all students retained were in Chicago, the data show, which has a policy for holding back 3rd graders based in part on test scores.)

Florida also dominated in retentions at the 7th grade, with 4,315 reported, compared with 2,655 in Texas, and fewer than 1,000 in California, Illinois, and New York.

But the figures for 9th grade tell a different story. Texas and California reported the most students retained, 30,660 and 26,260, respectively. In both cases, the vast majority of those students were Hispanic. In Florida, the survey found that 13,675 students had to repeat 9th grade, but only about one-quarter of those held back were Hispanics, roughly in line with the reported K-12 enrollment of Hispanics.

In the total K-12 data set, Florida's student population was 2.6 million, compared with 5.7 million for California and 4.2 million in Texas.

Robert Rothman, a senior fellow at the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#), a Washington-based research and advocacy group, said that he sees some reason for concern in the retention data, suggesting there may be a need to re-examine retention policies if they disproportionately affect minority students.

### ***Passing Algebra***

The data *Education Week* examined for Algebra 1 seem to suggest uneven enrollments across racial and ethnic groups in the middle school years, when some students take algebra.

In grades 7-8, about 11 percent of students taking Algebra 1 were black, while in the full data set, black students represented about 18 percent of the total in the data set. The enrollment rate for Hispanic students was more closely aligned with overall representation in the population: 21 percent enrolled, compared with 24 percent in the total student sample across all grade levels.

The differences appeared fairly small for passing rates. About 86 percent of white students in grades 7-8 passed, compared with 79 percent of black students and 78 percent of Hispanics.

Recent NAEP data reveal large achievement gaps in 8th grade math. They show that 49 percent of black students and 39 percent of Hispanic students scored below basic, compared with 16 percent of white students.

Experts note that, typically, students who take algebra in middle school are more advanced and prescreened, though California has taken steps to ensure that most middle schoolers take the subject.

Meanwhile at grades 9-10, about 24 percent of all students failed algebra, the OCR data show. And here, the differences among racial and ethnic groups were more pronounced. About 81 percent of white students passed, compared with 70 percent of both black and Hispanic students.

As for students in grades 11-12, the data show that a greater share of black students, 78 percent, passed algebra than any other group.

Tom Loveless, a senior scholar at the Brookings Institution, a think tank in Washington, said district data on algebra passing rates need to be taken with a grain of salt.

"Passing rates are a poor indicator of whether students have mastered algebra or any other subject matter," he said. "We know that students are often passed along who not only do not know algebra, but who also do not know content that they should have known years before. A good end-of-course test is the best indicator of learning."

[\(Back to top\)](#)

## When It Comes to Testing, Is Santorum Like Romney?

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

March 5, 2012

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2012/03/when\\_it\\_comes\\_to\\_testing\\_and\\_n.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2012/03/when_it_comes_to_testing_and_n.html)

Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum has been taking [some flak](#) on the campaign trail for his support of the No Child Left Behind Act back in 2001. He says his vote for the bill when he was in the U.S. Senate was a big mistake and he was just trying to be a good soldier for President George W. Bush.

But, in an interview with FOX News over the weekend, Santorum does say that the NCLB law brought one good thing with it: the requirement that states to offer standardized tests, which he thinks helped expose low-performing schools. Check out the transcript [here](#), and a video [here](#). The NCLB exchange starts at minute 11:40.

That line of thinking means that, at least when it comes to the testing part of the NCLB law, the former Pennsylvania senator is a lot like former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, aka the guy Santorum is trying to knock out to get the GOP's presidential nomination.

Romney's also a testing fan, although his current views on NCLB itself are a little murkier. As a candidate in 2008, Romney was NCLB's biggest cheerleader in the GOP presidential field, even when it was becoming no longer cool for Republicans to stand by the law. In fact, during a 2007 debate, he [cited](#) NCLB as one issue where he disagreed with the Republican base.

But this time around, Romney has been more coy on this issue. He doesn't talk about education much on the campaign trail, and it's tough to say exactly where he'd take the reauthorization of the law if he became president. In a speech on the NCLB law, he said, "I supported that and continue to support testing at the state level of our kids. But the real answer for me on education is get it back to the states."

Robert Costrell, a University of Arkansas professor, who [told me](#) that Romney supports the law in general, and thinks the federal government has a limited role in encouraging accountability and school choice. That's helpful, but it could translate into a lot of different policies.

But, like Santorum, Romney has been very clear about his love for standardized tests. It's a major theme of the very illuminating education chapter of Romney's [book](#) *No Apology*.

"President George W. Bush was right to champion the No Child Left Behind legislation, which requires states to test student progress and to evaluate school performance—it was the only way to ensure that critical information reached the public," Romney wrote. "Only the federal government had the clout to force testing through the barricade mounted by the national teachers' unions."

And Romney goes on to say that, if making sure students can read and write is "teaching to test," then "I'm all for it—our kids can't succeed in life without these basic literacy and numeracy skills."

Support for testing in some form may be in tune with the views some congressional Republicans. On the one hand, the [legislation](#) just approved on a partisan vote by the House education committee takes a big step back when it comes to the federal role in K-12. States would no longer have to set goals for student achievement. But the legislation largely keeps in place the current law's testing schedule—and requirement for disaggregation of data—minus science tests. Ready-made platform for Santorum? Romney too, or does it go too far for his taste?

Hard to say, since neither man has spoken about the bill publicly. And it's been easy for them to avoid taking a position, since education has been such an afterthought in the campaign. In fact, former New York City Schools chancellor Joel Klein has an [op-ed](#) in the *Washington Post* today, in which he talks about how disappointed he is that K-12 hasn't had a higher profile so far.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

## South by Southwest: Pearson Showcasing eBooks and Digital Classroom

WebProNews

By: Zach Walton

March 5, 2012

<http://www.webpronews.com/sxsw-2012-pearson-showcasing-ibooks-and-digital-classroom-2012-03>

South by Southwest has emerged as one of the top events to showcase new technologies and product announcements. Education will be a major topic this year and Pearson is leading the charge.

[Pearson](#) announced today that it will be showcasing its new eBooks and digital education initiative at SXSWedu. The eBooks presentation will go down on [Tuesday](#) while [Wednesday](#) will showcase their plans for the digital classroom of the future.

Pearson has been at the forefront of interactive textbooks by designing learning experiences based around video, 3D animation and other interactive images. To continue this trend, Pearson CEO [Marjorie Scardino](#) will be using her keynote at SXSWedu to showcase their new iBook line that allows students to digitally highlight, take notes, bookmark, quickly look up definitions, link to relevant topics and more.

“Educators across the country are making a major push to transform the classroom experience by integrating digital programs that will help better prepare students for college and careers,” said Mike Evans, Pearson Senior Vice President. “The classrooms of tomorrow are digital, and iBooks are among the interactive programs that will help teachers reach the Facebook generation of students in a way never before possible.”

While the push for iBooks is commendable, the cost of the iPad and other materials will still have to be considered. We [reported](#) on a study that found traditional textbooks to be the cheaper way to go for high schools at this point in time. Apple is the main factor when it comes to cost, but Pearson could introduce a way to lower costs somewhat so smarter education could be more affordable to all, especially in those areas that need it the most.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

## In Age of Tweets, Teachers Hammer the Grammar

Republican & Herald

By: Stephen J. Pytak

March 5, 2012

[http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2012/03/05/mct\\_patextlang.html](http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2012/03/05/mct_patextlang.html)

In the age of Facebook posts, emoticons and tweets, English grammar may seem like it's on the road to extinction.

"One of the more apparent problems we see in student writing is a carry-over of 'texting' language," Leslie Kraft, a ninth-grade English teacher at Pottsville Area, said Wednesday.

Brandon Kessock, a Pottsville Area freshman, said he's experienced it.

"Texting affects us a lot. I get so used to texting that I mess up a lot of easy words. Instead of 'what' I type 'wat.' Using my phone affects my grammar more than I ever knew," Kessock said.

Meghan Cleary, a freshman at Pottsville Area, said texting and messaging on social media have an impact on the way young people use grammar.

"It has affected them negatively because people often do not fully spell out words and add extra letters when texting or messaging. Sometimes when I switch papers to edit in class, I find my partner using text messaging words. However, it has affected people positively too. I see people on Twitter and Facebook commenting to correct spelling or grammar mistakes. People often mess up 'your' and 'you're' or 'they're,' 'there' and 'their,'" Cleary said.

Today is National Grammar Day. It's held each year on March 4 to promote the use of good grammar, writing and speaking skills in everyday life. It was started in 2008 by Martha Brockenbrough, founder of the Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar, according to [nationalgrammarday.com](http://nationalgrammarday.com).

In observance, local teachers and other experts in education offered their perspectives last week on how grammar should be taught in public schools.

State standards are going to get tougher, said Tim Eller, press secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

"The department is preparing to release new standards for all students and they are clearly more rigorous than those of 30 years ago. In addition, these standards will apply to all students, not just college-bound," Eller said.

Beginning July 1, 2013, following full implementation of a transition plan to be developed by the department in collaboration with education stakeholders, academic standards will be based on the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects, according to The Pennsylvania Code at [pacode.com](http://pacode.com).

What will remain the same, however, is teachers will still be able to develop their own curriculums, and decide whether or not to incorporate exercises like diagramming sentences, Eller said.

Mignon Fogarty, Reno, Nev., author of "Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing," said it's important for teachers to make the subject interesting.

"Keeping them engaged in whatever way you can should be the best way to teach grammar. I like to use humor in my podcasts, and we've gotten great feedback on the 'Correct the Celebrity' worksheets on the National Grammar Day website. It's more fun for a student to consider grammar in the context of a Justin Timberlake quotation than from a textbook or made-up example," Fogarty said Thursday.

Dr. Michael W. Smith, Philadelphia, a professor of literacy education at Temple University and co-writer of the book "Getting It

Right: Fresh Approaches to Teaching Grammar, Usage and Correctness," isn't a fan of diagramming sentences.

"It doesn't do any good. Diagramming sentences only teaches students how to diagram sentences," Smith said.

But Breanne Frandsen, an English teacher at Pottsville Area's D.H.H. Lengel Middle School, is an advocate of that method.

When Frandsen was a student at Pottsville Area, her teachers weren't using it.

"There was a phase where there was a focus completely on writing, where we did compositions and we did grammar through writing in middle school," Frandsen said.

After graduating from Pottsville Area in 2003, she learned to diagram sentences at Shippensburg University, where she graduated in 2007.

"Now at Pottsville Area we are trying to get back to teaching the grammar first, then encourage them to do compositions and editing. They start students in elementary school with a simple plot diagram," Frandsen said.

Students can learn how to diagram sentences on a website developed by the faculty of the Wisconsin Technical College System called [wisc-online.com](http://wisc-online.com).

"Diagramming sentences has not been much in vogue as a pedagogical device for the past 30 years or so. There are, however, many grammarians and English instructors who hold that analyzing a sentence and portraying its structure with a consistent visual scheme can be helpful," according to the online [Guide to Grammar and Writing](#) sponsored by the Capital Community College Foundation, Hartford, Conn.

Not all teachers at Pottsville Area use these diagrams.

"As a student and early in my teaching career, grammar instruction consisted mainly of memorizing grammatical elements, like gerunds, appositives and participles, and doing worksheets to practice identifying these parts," Kraft said.

"Some teachers have experimented with diagramming as a means of helping visual learners, but we pretty much stick with our philosophy of teaching the grammar and writing together," said Suzanne Sterner, an English teacher at D.H.H. Lengel.

"That allows students to use and apply what they learn, rather than just focusing on memorization," Kraft said.

Smith believes it's the best way to teach grammar.

"It's important to put students in situations where they get an immediate payoff for using grammar skills," Smith said.

While new technology brings new challenges, it also offers educators new tools, Kraft said.

"There are a variety of applications for the Apple iPad which help students to improve their writing skills. Additionally, research shows that students become better writers by reading texts they enjoy. Thus, a major component of our overall English curriculum is devoted to connecting students with appropriate texts and creating life-long readers," Kraft said.

Savvy Facebook users who like their posts to be clear and concise use a grammar checker at [facebook.com/grammarly](https://www.facebook.com/grammarly).

[\(Back to top\)](#)

## **STATE NEWS**

### **Opinion: All Students could access high-quality education**

Richmond Times-Dispatch

By: Deirdre Finn

March 6, 2012

<http://www2.timesdispatch.com/news/oped/2012/mar/06/tdopin02-finn-all-students-could-access-high-quali-ar-1742384/>

Virginia lawmakers are being asked today to consider legislation (SB 598) that severely restricts students' access to a high-quality education. This legislation prohibits students from enrolling in an approved virtual school that is offered by a school division other than their own.

In this day and age, the Internet makes geography irrelevant to getting a great education. Virtual learning tears down the greatest barrier to high-quality education — access to a rigorous curriculum taught by effective educators. With virtual learning, all students — particularly those in rural regions or urban centers — can access the same high quality education typically enjoyed by students in affluent suburban neighborhoods. Students who live anywhere can learn anywhere. For many students, the option to attend a virtual school is a lifeline to an education that prepares them for success in college and challenging 21st-

century careers.

Technology has changed the way we live, work and play. It has increased productivity in the workplace and enhanced communication with family and friends. And it has the power to transform education.

Imagine if the law applied the same restrictions to other areas of life. Limiting online shopping to stores in your neighborhood would likely cause outrage. Restricting access to Web-based learning should cause the same reaction.

Last year, I was part of a team of independent researchers that reviewed and analyzed education policies in every state in the nation for Digital Learning Now!, a national initiative launched by former Govs. Jeb Bush (R-Fla.) and Bob Wise (D-W.Va.) to harness the power of technology to provide an education that prepares each and every student for success in college and challenging 21st-century careers. Virginia scored well in that analysis, but this legislation runs the risk of reversing all the progress Virginia has made.

Digital learning, whether offered online or in the classroom, has the potential to customize education so every student learns — no student gets bored and no student gets left behind.

The greatest obstacles to students accessing virtual education are not funding, availability of high-quality options, technology or Internet connectivity. The greatest obstacles are policies that allow school divisions to deny virtual education to students and the use of geography to determine eligibility — both of which are relics of an education system that was established well before the World Wide Web. SB 598 in its current form exacerbates both of these problems.

Allowing students to choose a virtual school outside of their school division would offer multiple benefits.

First, students would only be allowed to choose from a school that has been approved by a school division in the state of Virginia. All virtual school options would be approved by a school division.

Second, multiple options would allow students to choose the school that ensures their greatest chance of academic success. Providing students with the best opportunity to earn a high school diploma, even if it is not the choice of the school division, is in the best interests of the students whose future depends on their education and the taxpayers who pay for the results.

Third, not all school divisions would have to contract with all providers, which would reduce the burden on school divisions while maximizing choices for students. Given the tremendous pressure on education budgets, this option could provide a welcome relief to school divisions.

The original legislation provided a common-sense solution to the challenge of paying for virtual school, given the varied funding levels provided by school divisions throughout Virginia. The proposed legislation established an equitable formula to pay for the education of students who attend virtual school and left the choice to the families, not the school divisions.

But the original legislation, which would have empowered students and parents, has been severely amended. It is now nearly 180 degrees from where it started.

Virginia lawmakers have the opportunity to tap into the incredible potential of technology to transform education and unleash the academic potential of students across the state. Our hope is, lawmakers will embrace the power of online learning and ensure all students have access to a quality education.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

## **New Jersey Senate Education Committee discusses tenure reform bill's nuts and bolts**

The New Jersey Star-Ledger/NJ.com

By: Jeanette Rundquist

March 5, 2012

[http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/03/senate\\_education\\_committee\\_dis.html](http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/03/senate_education_committee_dis.html)

**TRENTON** — The details of tenure reform — who is affected, when it starts and how it will be paid for — were discussed in the Senate Education Committee today.

Teachers union leaders, school superintendents, retired teachers, state officials, business leaders, school advocates and others testified in a more than three-hour hearing on the bill introduced last month by Sen. Teresa Ruiz (D-Essex.)

"There is no greater urgency in my city," Newark Mayor Cory Booker said.

Several speakers urged that teachers get a greater part in the process.

"Teachers need to have a voice in this bill ... as we move forward with these decisions," said Donna Chiera, a retired Perth Amboy teacher, and president of the American Federation of Teachers of New Jersey.

Money was also an issue, with several speakers saying funds are needed for professional development and other requirements under the bill — to which Deputy Education Commissioner Andrew Smarick said the law "doesn't require vast new sums of money."

He said school districts will be able to "repurpose" existing money to cover costs.

The Department of Education made a similar argument last year, however, providing no new funds for the state's anti-bullying law — but was told by the Council of Local Mandates that they need to provide some funding, recast the law, or watch key provisions expire.

Ruiz last month introduced the tenure reform bill that, coupled with a new evaluation system currently in the works, would do away with the tenure that New Jersey teachers now earn after three years on the job.

Under the new bill, new teachers would be evaluated on a four-step scale from ineffective to highly effective. Being rated effective or highly effective for three years means they earn tenure. Tenured teachers who are rated ineffective or partially effective for two years in a row, then, will lose tenure. Teachers hired before the bill takes effect would gain tenure the old way, but are still subject to the evaluations and removal.

Some amendments to the bill were announced today. The bill, originally proposed to cover just teachers, principals, assistant and vice-principals, will now also cover guidance counselors, school nurses, or any certified staff.

Ruiz said the effective date of the bill would be the 2013-14 school year, but she also told Department of Education staff officials that the changes must match the roll-out of a new teacher evaluation system. That system is being piloted in 10 school districts now, to be expanded to 30 districts next year, then the whole state in 2013-14.

The state's largest teacher's union, the NJEA, was critical of the idea of introducing a new tenure bill, before the evaluation system is finished. "Addressing tenure without .... (established) evaluation is like building a house before the foundation is set," said Ginger Gold Schnitzer, NJEA's director of government relations.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

## lowans flock to House to weigh in on school reforms

Des Moines Register

By: Jason Noble and Jason Clayworth

March 5, 2012

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20120306/NEWS02/303060031/1004/lowans-flock-House-weigh-school-reforms>

Parents and teachers, administrators and board members, labor leaders and business executives crowded into the Iowa House chamber Monday night to weigh in on proposals for sweeping K-12 education reform.

The public hearing, which attracted about 70 lowans seeking to testify and dozens more who wanted to observe the proceedings, followed weeks of work by lawmakers to reshape the overhaul plan offered by Gov. Terry Branstad into two separate proposals — one favored by the Republican-controlled House and another put forward by the Democratic majority in the Senate.

It foreshadowed floor debate in both chambers on those competing plans and, all sides hope, an ultimate compromise that can win approval before lawmakers adjourn this spring.

Branstad led off the testimony Monday night, challenging lawmakers to pass an education overhaul that hasn't been "watered down."

"I'm appealing to you tonight to pass ambitious education reform that moves Iowa forward with a sense of urgency," Branstad said. "Our legislative package is ambitious because Iowa has a lot of work to do. Watering it down is not fair to Iowa children."

Iowa's failure to take on broad-based reform has allowed other states to surpass it in education achievement, he said.

"We are shortchanging the career potential of young lowans," Branstad said. "We are shortchanging the companies that would hire them."

The reforms in play this year touch nearly every aspect of education, including teacher hiring, firing and evaluation; student testing; early-grade literacy; charter schools; and Internet-based learning.

The proposal officially under consideration at the hearing was the Republican-favored version approved by the House Education Committee late last month, although comments didn't strictly adhere to the measures found in that 81-page bill.

**There was** a wide range of testimony. Some speakers supported the plan, others opposed it, some had opinions on specific measures, and still others offered thoughts on the general concepts.

Perhaps the strongest support came from Ankeny School District Superintendent Matthew Wendt, who said he favored changes

to the state's core curriculum; requirement of end-of-course exams that factor into high school graduation and college entrance exams for high school juniors; and "competency-based" education that allows students to receive credit for proving mastery of a subject rather than completing a course.

"The education reform proposals in the Iowa House and Senate both add critical content to the core curriculum and make it clear we are not retreating from high expectations," Wendt said.

Not everyone was so charitable.

Former Des Moines school board member Graham Gillette complimented Branstad for pursuing school reform but expressed stern criticism of some of the ideas.

Gillette in particular objected to language in the bill requiring schools to hold back third-graders who aren't proficient in reading. He urged lawmakers to find ways to improve programs to help students who are behind rather than to hold them back.

"The law that only penalizes and fails a student by making him repeat classes in lessons that did not work for him the first time is compounding the problem with humiliation and convincing the student he is a failure," he said.

Iowa City teacher-librarian Anne Marie Kraus likewise saw the reform proposals as a "mixed bag" that include a few welcome ideas alongside questionable ones.

Kraus, a member of the Iowa State Education Association, encouraged the Legislature to adopt measures giving local school districts more power to enact reform rather than mandating change from Des Moines.

"If good teaching is the goal, why does the Legislature repeatedly cut funding to our three regents universities, most notably UNI, our premier teacher-training institution?" Kraus asked, referring to the University of Northern Iowa.

**A preference** for local control was also sounded by Des Moines resident Vicki Stogdill, who implored lawmakers to resist giving more power to the state.

"Today we're seeing more control over our schools by state regulators than ever in the history of Iowa," Stogdill said. "But it hasn't netted the desired gains in student achievement."

The state's fall from the top of U.S. education rankings has coincided with increasing state control over schools, Stogdill said. That increasing control threatens to turn local school boards into "compliance mechanisms" and "middle managers" rather than elected bodies that set local standards.

Any reforms should resist further state control and give more responsibility to local districts and school boards, she said. "Please reject proposals that hand more power to the state."

**Opposition also** came from labor groups, who questioned the need for a total overhaul of the education system.

ASFCME Iowa Council 61 President Danny Homan said additional resources for schools — not massive reform — are what's needed to improve education in Iowa.

Rather than reforms that tie teacher evaluation to test scores and taking away seniority considerations in layoffs, lawmakers should boost funding for schools and teachers, Homan said.

"The Iowa educational system does not need a radical overhaul," he said. "It needs proper resources."

The union represents bus drivers, paraprofessionals, custodians, secretaries and preschool workers in Iowa schools.

Ken Sagar, president of the Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, was even more critical: "Education reform has unfortunately become a huge economic engine for many companies, and Iowa has been in the spotlight for overhaul fundamentally because they see it as a cash cow they can milk."

**Alongside such** statements on reform were many more three-minute statements from teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders and others keying in on specific areas of reform.

Several speakers called for banning nicotine on school property. One warned lawmakers not to trust for-profit companies offering online education services.

Another spoke out in favor of a statewide network for getting parents involved in their local schools. Another favored alternate certification options for educators and administrators.

And several teachers called for more time to develop their lesson plans and collaborate.

"If you want to have a direct impact on student achievement, focus on providing teachers with time and resources to excel," said Connie Terry of Greenfield, an education consultant for the Green Valley Area Education Agency.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

## **N.C. students may get chance to rate teachers**

The Charlotte Observer

By: Ann Doss Helms

March 6, 2012

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/03/06/3072462/nc-students-may-get-chance-to.html>

Hey, kids: How good is your teacher?

This spring, students in the Charlotte region will test-drive a survey that could eventually give them a voice in their teachers' job evaluations.

"We think it will be good feedback from someone other than their principal," said N.C. Department of Public Instruction Chief Academic Officer Rebecca Garland.

Of course, they won't face vague questions about whether the teachers are good or nice - the kind of "popularity contest" questions that give teachers and taxpayers the shudders.

The state is spending almost \$600,000 in federal Race to the Top money to craft a test that asks meaningful questions about what teachers do, rather than how kids feel.

Cambridge Education, an international consulting company, is preparing surveys based on ones used in Harvard University research on effective teaching. That research, which included Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools teachers who volunteered to participate, found students did a pretty good job at identifying teacher behaviors that are linked to academic gains.

The N.C. pilot will go to a scientific sampling of 150,000 students, from kindergarten through 12th grade, in 29 districts. Those include CMS and schools in Cabarrus, Kannapolis, Iredell-Statesville, Caldwell, Anson and Rutherford, as well as most of the state's large school districts.

There will be 30-question and 90-question surveys, paper and online versions. The youngest students will be asked to circle pictures or yes/no answers, while older ones will use agree/disagree scales.

Once results are in, state officials will consider whether and how to incorporate a student survey into teacher and principal evaluations. The Race to the Top grant requires North Carolina to craft a new standard based on student performance data. That will certainly involve test results, but could also include student views.

Teachers and principals who participate in the pilot will see their results, Garland said. If there are enough results, preferably spread over more than one year, they can provide strong guidance on where teachers and schools could improve.

CMS has long surveyed students on their schools, with questions about topics from fights and behavior to whether adults care about students. But the district hasn't asked about individual teachers.

CMS teachers have been discussing student surveys as part of the district's talent-effectiveness project. Trina Potter, a teacher at Ashley Park Pre-K-8 School, told the school board her study group thinks the surveys could provide good guidance. But she said they're waiting to see results of the state pilot.

[\(Back to top\)](#)