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NATIONAL NEWS

Census: Education Has Greater Effect on Earnings than Race, Gender

Education Week

By: Sarah D. Sparks

September 9, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2011/09/census_education_has_greater_e.html

A worker's level of education has a greater effect on his or her earnings over the course of a 40-year career than any other demographic factor, including gender or race, according to a new [study released this week](#) by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Based on an analysis of 2006 to 2008 data from the nationally representative survey, Census researchers found that the difference in annual earnings between getting a professional degree, such as a master's or doctoral degree, and dropping out of high school was about \$72,000, five times the \$13,000 annual wage difference between genders. Those with higher levels of education were also more likely to be employed full time and year-round.

The study comes as policymakers [revisit](#) the importance of higher education at a time of rising tuition and sinking job prospects for new graduates.

Race and gender still played a strong role in lifetime earnings, however. White men had higher earnings than any other group at each education level below a master's degree, where they were out-earned only by Asian men. Moreover, workers of some racial groups got more value from higher degrees than others did. For example, while Asian, Hispanic and non-Hispanic black workers with just a high school diploma made roughly similar earnings over a 40-year career span, an Asian man with a master's degree could expect to earn nearly \$3.5 million during his career, while, with the same academic credentials, a Hispanic man would earn \$2.8 million, and a non-Hispanic black woman would earn only \$2.3 million during the same time frame.

The Census researchers also compared the data to previous educational attainment data and found that the overall level of education in America has risen dramatically in the past. As of 2008, 85 percent of adults ages 25 and older had at least a high school diploma, up from 24.5 percent in 1940.

However, they found those who speak English as a second language had an annual decrease in earnings, after accounting for education and other issues. Those who spoke English "very well" still saw \$989 less each year compared to workers who spoke only English.

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New Groups Giving Teachers Alternative Voice

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

September 12, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/09/14/03voice_ep.h31.html?tkn=SNLF%2BQnshmOuO3x95fGhW9wxeMwjS7mRUPd&cmp=clp-edweek

In times of great uncertainty for U.S. teachers, who speaks for them? The question is almost axiomatic in its simplicity, but the answer is far less clear-cut.

The teachers' unions remain the most visible, powerful, and probably the most important advocates for teachers. But over the past few years, a number of new efforts have sprung up purporting to give teachers a say in policy, and their emergence is extending discussions about "teacher voice" in unexpected ways.

In general, the groups' origins, goals, and purposes remain diverse, and their work continues to evolve. Where the groups seem to converge, though, is that their members are gradually becoming involved in conversations about policy, ranging from teacher evaluation to seniority to professional development.

Groups include the Los Angeles-based [NewTLA](#), which operates as a caucus within the city teachers' union, and the [Educators 4 Excellence](#) group in New York City, which has purposely worked outside the teachers' union.

Two other efforts, one begun by the Boston-based Teach Plus nonprofit organization and the other by the Carrboro, N.C.-based Center for Teaching Quality, have gathered together teachers in multiple cities. Their approaches are similar: providing those teachers with research on issues of interest and avenues for interacting with policymakers.

"There are so many teachers out there who want change and have great ideas, but they've had so few venues and vehicles to be heard, understood, and embraced," said Barnett Berry, the president of the center. "They're itching for the research knowledge to help them articulate the connections between policy and practice."

New Majority

It is hard to point to just one factor that has led to the surge in such groups.

One important influence, though, could be demographic changes. According to an analysis of federal data conducted by Teach Plus, 52 percent of teachers now have 10 or fewer years in the teaching profession, a phenomenon the group refers to as "the new majority."

Teach Plus' founder, Celine Coggins, began the organization in 2007 to give such teachers leadership opportunities and, ultimately, to help retain them in the profession.

"Having a say in how our schools look and function will play a role in their decisionmaking about whether they're going to stay for another 10 years, or two, or five," Ms. Coggins said.

The Center for Teaching Quality's efforts date to 2003, when it began an initiative to assemble a cadre of accomplished teachers to discuss the broad issues facing the profession. Gradually, the idea has evolved into the [New Millennium Initiative](#), in which local networks of teachers work to make their voices heard on topics of local interest, such as the implementation of new state laws.

Support from a variety of private national and local foundations, including the Joyce Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Denver-based Rose Community Foundation, have helped in the transition. (The Joyce Foundation underwrites coverage of improvements to the teaching profession in *Education Week*, and the Gates Foundation provides grant support to Editorial Projects in Education, the newspaper's parent company.)

Jessica Keigan, a high school language arts teacher in Denver participating in the initiative there, said she was excited not just about having her voice heard, but also in learning the details of how education policy is made.

"I'd never immersed myself in policy before," she said, "and it's been a great way to see how decisions get made and to feel I had some awareness and also some say."

The Educators 4 Excellence group was formed by Evan Stone and Sydney Morris, who were frustrated by a lack of control over district policy decisions while teaching in a traditional public school in New York City. Their decision to form a group for like-minded colleagues, in 2010, quickly attracted other teachers.

"There are all these new changes created at the 30,000-foot level pushed down to you," Ms. Morris said. "It's our mission to include teachers in creation of those changes."

Whither Unions?

The traditional teachers' unions have had a variety of reactions to the emergent organizations, ranging from respectful to uneasy.

NewTLA, for instance, began as a group of Los Angeles teachers who were frustrated with the local union's failure to put forth

proposals on teacher evaluation and professional development.

In the union's recent internal election, NewTLA-affiliated members won a significant number of seats on the United Teachers Los Angeles' governing body.

NewTLA co-founder Jordan Henry turned down several interview requests, saying that the caucus would be putting together a more specific agenda and set of initiatives this fall. The group's website says that its priorities will be "determined and decided solely by dues-paying UTLA members," and that it "improves union governance through greater representation of the many voices."

The Educators 4 Excellence group, by contrast, is unabashedly working outside New York City's United Federation of Teachers. Its founders say they didn't feel their interactions with the union were productive.

"It became very clear in those conversations that the union needs to have one stance on every issue," Mr. Stone said. "We didn't feel that on the issues where we disagreed there was room for debate, or discussion, or dialogue. We felt the opportunity to have buy-in needed to be outside the established organization."

Meanwhile, Ms. Coggins of Teach Plus underscored that her group's theory of action is that improved engagement for teachers in the issues that affect them will result in improved student achievement. Often, that means more participation in teachers' unions, and the organization encourages such work.

Alex Seeskin, a policy fellow with Teach Plus' [Chicago cohort](#), was initially skeptical of becoming more deeply involved with the Chicago Teachers Union. But after joining a union committee on teacher evaluations, he found diverse opinions among rank-and-file teachers, rather than hard and fast dogma.

"The more I've read, the more discussions I've had, the more I'm able to see not only a teacher's point of view, but also a union delegate's point of view and administrator's point of view, and realize most of the time, these issues are more complex than one- or two-line sound bites," Mr. Seeskin said of his participation with Teach Plus and the CTU.

"The education debate we have, both local and national, has become hyperpartisan, and there isn't much room for moderates," he continued. "Teach Plus has helped me figure out how we can help find middle ground, especially locally."

Affecting Policy

Each of the groups has made its mark on local policies, and many of them explicitly describe their work as "solutions-oriented."

The Center for Teaching Quality's Denver teachers, for example, are providing input into the implementation of a Colorado bill that passed last year that overhauls teacher-evaluation and -tenure provisions. They've submitted early comments for rulemaking on that bill. The state education department, state lawmakers, and the Colorado Education Association have all invited the group's input.

"There's been so much frustration and mistrust among the different groups," Ms. Keigan, the high school teacher, said. "I hope we can find that common page to be on."

In New York, the E4E group pushed to base layoffs in the city on three criteria, rather than the reverse-seniority provisions in state law. Those changes were included in a state Senate bill. (The measure passed the Senate but was not introduced in the Assembly.)

[Teach Plus' policy fellows](#) have selected a variety of hot topics for study, such as the unequal distribution of talent and the difficult nuances of teacher-evaluation systems. Its [Boston fellows](#) helped craft a model to encourage highly effective teachers to transfer to, and stay in, challenging schools, a venture now in its second year. ("[Teacher Teams Help Schools Turn Around.](#)" April 20, 2011.)

In Indianapolis, Teach Plus members proposed changes in layoff policies to the Indianapolis Federation of Teachers, which were ultimately codified in a new collective bargaining agreement in 2010. And in Chicago, the policy fellows have called for a peer-assistance and -review program, in which experienced teachers help coach novices. They have also weighed in on teacher evaluations, an area in which the city is currently in limbo, having scrapped a pilot program in favor of a new framework.

'Astroturf'?

The policy issues tackled, as well as the groups' goals and origins, have made several of them fodder for criticism.

Some observers have referred to the new groups as "astroturf," a pejorative term for a grassroots organization that is actually a front for a vested interest. E4E, in particular, has fought against that claim.

To become a member of the E4E group, which received some \$160,000 in start-up funding from the Gates Foundation, individuals must sign a declaration asserting, among other beliefs, that teachers should be evaluated based on student progress and that tenure policies should be rethought. Those positions are generally consistent with the teacher-effectiveness philosophy expounded by Gates.

E4E's members "have a thin grasp of education policy" outside of hot-button issues favored by self-styled reformers, contended Leo Casey, the vice president of academic issues for the United Federation of Teachers. "They don't really have to a lot to say about instruction."

But Ms. Morris said the group is not anti-union, and further, that its declaration is merely a starting point for conversations. "Some of the items are newer ideas, I think, but there is a lot of room to discuss and debate the details," she said. Its board of directors, she added, is entirely staffed by teachers.

In 2009, Teach Plus received a \$4 million grant over several years from the Gates Foundation. But Ms. Coggins says the foundation has merely helped increase the number of policy-fellow teams and has in no way influenced their work.

Ms. Coggins attributes criticism of Teach Plus to the sensitive problems the teachers have chosen to address.

"Frankly, the process [the teacher teams] experience in generating new ideas, helping to see them through to a point of viability, figuring out the funding for them and the conditions of success is always tricky and different," she said. "There's not exactly a formula, and sometimes we're looked upon with suspicion" by outside organizations and pundits.

Policy fellows sometimes choose not to endorse high-profile policy efforts championed by philanthropies, Ms. Coggins noted. For instance, the Chicago fellows didn't support a recent bill overhauling teacher tenure and evaluation rules in Illinois, over concerns about a provision curbing the right of Chicago teachers to strike.

The Gates Foundation has in the past also donated to both national teachers' unions, though in proportionally smaller amounts.

Staying Power

The test of the new groups' ability to help reshape the teaching profession will come in part from their staying power, as well as what their teacher members go on to do.

"I think our influence is just starting now," said Noah Zeichner, a high school social studies teacher in Seattle who works with the New Millennium Initiative team there. "Teachers are invested in the classroom, and they are always engaged in the complexity of teaching, which I think is easy to forget and difficult to understand, if you don't experience that reality every day."

For now, Mr. Seeskin says participating in Teach Plus has given him a new outlook on the profession.

"I was in Southeast Asia and spent a beautiful afternoon inside writing a long essay for the Teach Plus message board, and my wife was like, 'Please stop, we're on vacation,'" Mr. Seeskin recalled. "It was the first time that I really felt about policy, 'This is so cool. I love this.'"

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Obama Calls for \$60 Billion to Save Teacher Jobs, Fix Schools

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

September 8, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/09/president_barack_obama_will_ca.html

UPDATE

President Barack Obama called for \$30 billion in new money to stave off teacher layoffs—and \$30 billion more to revamp facilities at the nation's K-12 schools and community colleges—as he outlined his vision for spurring the sputtering economy in a speech to Congress Thursday night.

The education proposals will be part of a \$447 billion legislative package expected to be introduced next week. The president said he would propose cuts elsewhere to pay for the plan, but he didn't release specifics.

However, details have emerged on what the education portion will look like.

K-12 schools could get up to \$25 billion for renovations, which administration officials estimate could pay for makeovers of at least 35,000 public schools. That construction money could be used for emergency repairs and renovations, energy efficiency updates, and asbestos removal. Schools also could use the money to build new science and computer labs, and to update technology. Another \$5 billion would go to help retool community college facilities.

States would have until Sept. 30, 2012, to decide how to spend the construction money. It would be sent to states based on need, but the biggest 100 districts would get a direct grant. Within states, half the construction money would be competitive, with special priority for rural schools, and the rest would go out by formula. (For more on a possible legislative vehicle for the plan, click [here](#).)

The \$30 billion to avert teacher layoffs, to be spent over two years, could save as many as 280,000 educators' jobs, senior administration officials estimated. To put that \$30 billion in perspective, that's about twice as much as districts got from the main

federal K-12 program—Title I grants for disadvantaged students—this year.

Districts could use the layoff money to pay for benefits and to hire new staff. And states would *not* have to agree to sign on to the administration's four big education reform priorities—state data systems, turning around low-performing schools, improving teacher distribution, and boosting standards. That's a significant departure from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which sought to reform education while strengthening the economy.

So will this pass?

Probably not.

There's almost no chance that Republicans—who generally think the \$100 billion for education in the stimulus was a giant waste of money—will rush to support this. Remember, the administration had a very tough time getting Congress to approve \$10 billion for the Education Jobs Fund back in the summer of 2010, when Democrats had healthy majorities in both chambers.

In fact, moments after the speech, GOP Rep. John Kline, chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, said:

"More stimulus spending is not the right solution to our nation's job crisis. Common sense tells us that putting the federal government in the business of school construction will only lead to higher costs and more regulations. It also tells us that another teacher union bailout will not ensure a quality education for our children."

Rep. George Miller, the top Democrat on the committee, applauded the proposals, saying many of the steps the president called for were the right ones:

"Congress must put partisanship aside and seize this moment to work together to put Americans back to work and our economy forward moving forward."

Miller recently introduced a bill to help spur local job creation through public sector job creation.

Sen. Tom Harkin, the chairman of the Senate panels that oversee K-12 spending and policy, also cheered the education jobs money and the school construction funding:

"The president's call to renovate our schools is a win-win for our economy and for our children. Kids cannot be expected to reach their full potential if the school they attend is crumbling around them."

But the school facilities funding is going to face a rough road, too. Top Democrats on the education panels, including Miller, D-Calif., and Harkin, D-Iowa, tried to get money for school facilities into the original stimulus bill. But it was stripped out to win approval from moderate Democrats and Republicans. It's tough to see a path for a program like that in the current, much more conservative Congress.

Supporters of the proposals recognize those challenges, but they're hoping Congress can be swayed by public opinion.

"If they were to vote today, then the House Republicans would defeat it," admitted Ross Eisenbrey, the vice-president of the Economic Policy Institute, a non-partisan think tank (which has union officials on its board). He wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* urging Obama to include money for school facilities in the package. "I'm hoping the public reacts to this and says, 'That's the kind of federal spending that I want.'"

"I think the American people are saying to Congress, it's time that you start caring about us," Dennis Van Roekel, the president of the National Education Association, told me. "We have stories coming from the field, classes as large as forty or forty-five students in the elementary grades ... that's just wrong."

Van Roekel said the NEA members would share those stories with their congressmen to help "put a face" on the problem.

Politics K-12 analysis: Administration officials have said this jobs package has pieces that have garnered broad bipartisan support, but the education piece seems more like a re-election campaign promise than a serious legislative proposal.

The Obama administration will need the two teachers' unions—the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers—to help with get-out-the-vote efforts in swing states. The NEA has already [endorsed](#) Obama's re-election campaign, but teachers are still skeptical of his policies (especially his push to tie teachers' pay—and their jobs—to student outcomes).

The administration has got to be hoping that asking for money to save teachers' jobs will help bridge that enthusiasm gap ... even as teachers realize that Congress will probably say no.

But Van Roekel thinks the union has continued to have a strong relationship with the president.

"American schools needed to be upgraded and repaired, not our relationship," he said.

And these proposals are sure to reignite the debate over whether the education part of the ARRA was money down the toilet—or much needed funding to help boost student achievement and spur local economic growth.

In case you missed it, here's an excerpt from the president's speech:

"The American Jobs Act will repair and modernize at least 35,000 schools. It will put people to work right now fixing roofs and windows; installing science labs and high-speed internet in classrooms all across this country. It will rehabilitate homes and businesses in communities hit hardest by foreclosures. It will jumpstart thousands of transportation projects across the country. And to make sure the money is properly spent and for good purposes, we're building on reforms we've already put in place. No more earmarks. No more boondoggles. No more bridges to nowhere. We're cutting the red tape that prevents some of these projects from getting started as quickly as possible. And we'll set up an independent fund to attract private dollars and issue loans based on two criteria: how badly a construction project is needed and how much good it would do for the economy.

"This idea came from a bill written by a Texas Republican and a Massachusetts Democrat. The idea for a big boost in construction is supported by America's largest business organization and America's largest labor organization. It's the kind of proposal that's been supported in the past by Democrats and Republicans alike. You should pass it right away.

"Pass this jobs bill, and thousands of teachers in every state will go back to work. These are the men and women charged with preparing our children for a world where the competition has never been tougher. But while they're adding teachers in places like South Korea, we're laying them off in droves. It's unfair to our kids. It undermines their future and ours. And it has to stop. Pass this jobs bill, and put our teachers back in the classroom where they belong."

Oh, and Education Secretary Arne Duncan was the Cabinet official left out of the speech this time, a precaution taken in case of a disaster.

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FLORIDA NEWS

Florida virtual-school options expand

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

September 11, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-florida-virtual-school-expansion-20110911.0.1219804.full.story>

Florida, a pioneer in the field of virtual education, is extending its digital reach this year with a new law that will push even more students to log on to learn.

It is a move some educators call worrisome, fearful it really is an effort to cut costs, not boost education, and uncertain all online offerings are the right fit for so many youngsters.

But others say the Digital Learning Now law is precisely what Florida needs to prepare children for a technology-based future and to free them from the geographic constraints of the walled classroom.

"Online courses help level the playing field so that every student can access a world-class education," Susan Patrick, president of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning, wrote in an email.

Florida is a national leader in the field, having established the Florida Virtual School in 1997, the first such state-run program in the nation, Patrick said. And the new law — which expands both part- and full-time virtual options — keeps the state at the forefront of online education, which is "growing explosively," according to the association.

The state law requires high-school students to take an online course to earn a diploma, gives bright elementary students new virtual options, expands the established Florida Virtual School and allows new virtual charter schools to open.

A review last year by the U.S. Department of Education, however, cautioned there had been "few rigorous research studies" on the effect of online education in the kindergarten-to-12th-grade arena. Previous studies had focused mostly on college students and seemed to show they did best in "blended" courses that mixed online learning with old-fashioned, "face-to-face" instruction, the report said.

A "blizzard of hype" surrounds virtual education, said Alex Molnar, a professor at the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado. But, he added, "there's simply no support in the research for the kind of frenetic policymaking" taking place.

"The research legs underneath it are spindly and weak and inconclusive," Molnar said.

The hype comes from both those who can make money off virtual education, Molnar added, and those, like former Gov. Jeb Bush, who view it as another piece in the school-choice movement.

Pros and cons

Virtual education has been touted as a cost-effective model. The Florida Virtual School says it spends about \$2,500 less per student than a traditional school because it does not need to maintain buildings, run buses or keep up athletic fields.

But the Florida House estimated the new law will actually cost the state money this year — perhaps \$6 million more — as some students not currently in the public-education system take part and require state funding.

Most students who participate in virtual education do so to supplement their work in traditional schools. Last year, more than 115,000 students across the state took at least one course with the Florida Virtual School.

The new law will boost those part-time enrollments because, starting with this year's ninth-graders, an online class becomes a graduation requirement.

"That is going to be significant," said Gary Marks, the administrator who oversees virtual programs for Volusia County schools.

Though many "high performers" have done well with virtual high-school courses, those classes could be tough for struggling students, he said.

"I'm sure there are going to be kids who find this is not the best way for them to be educated," said Kelli Stargel, R-Lakeland, the Florida House sponsor of the new law.

For that reason, the law leaves the type of course taken online up to the student, allowing electives and "core courses."

The goal is to give all students a taste of the type of course offered in college and access to classes perhaps not offered on their campuses.

"It just opens up the world," she added.

Last year, Miami-Dade County schools put nearly 7,000 high-school students in virtual classes — which they took from school computer labs — to dodge the state's strict class-size law.

"They were just warehoused," said Karen Aronowitz, president of United Teachers of Dade.

The virtual school concedes the rollout in Miami-Dade was not ideal but said, in the end, 81 percent of the students enrolled in those virtual classes successfully completed them.

But Aronowitz remains doubtful virtual education is right for so many students.

"Kids have to be kind of mature," she said. Otherwise, "students get stuck, don't know what to do" and sometimes "just stop," if they don't have a teacher to help them.

2 paths

The maturity issue may be part of why the new virtual option for elementary students has attracted few takers so far. It allows fourth- and fifth-graders who scored well on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test to skip an elementary course and, instead, take a middle-school one virtually.

That option was open to about 5,700 Seminole County students, but fewer than 90 kids have signed up. Statewide enrollment is fewer than 1,000.

Deidre Sullivan's son Slade could have opted out of fourth-grade math at Woodlands Elementary in Seminole to take a sixth-grade math class online. Though initially the idea seemed "cool," she feared skipping ahead would lead to gaps in his knowledge. She also wondered how well a 9-year-old would work independently at a computer — in the school media center, perhaps — without an instructor who could immediately answer his questions or help keep him focused.

And, Sullivan said, she knew what he would miss.

"I do think he's got one of the best fourth-grade teachers around, so it seemed kind of pointless to take him out of the classroom where he'll get good instruction," she added.

Some younger students have done well with virtual learning, but they usually work at home with a parent who can keep them on task.

Nicole Wolfe, who lives in the Celebration community in Osceola County, has both her children, ages 9 and 11, enrolled full-time in the Florida Virtual School. She loves the teacher interaction via phone and email, and the flexibility it provides.

Her kids can work ahead in math, a subject in which they excel, adjust their schedule if grandparents are in town, and "if something triggers their fancy, you can stop and focus on it."

But Wolf said the setup — both children on computers in separate areas of the house — does require "a commitment from the family" because a parent must be home to help and supervise.

Virtual charters

If more families want to follow that path, they soon could have more virtual options than ever.

The state virtual school can enroll more students now, while new virtual charter schools are seeking approval for future students. Some virtual charter schools would require students to work from home, while others would provide a building where students would learn solely via computers.

About a dozen virtual charters have applied to open in Central Florida next year.

The Central Florida Virtual Charter School Board is looking to open virtual academies in most local counties.

"I thought it was cutting edge," said Mary Bennett, a retired Volusia teacher and administrator serving as chairwoman of the Virtual Charter School Board.

Bennett doesn't think online learning will work for everyone — "you have to be self-motivated; you have to be focused" — but thinks it could be a good match for many technologically savvy youngsters.

"I think it's exciting to see how it goes," she added.

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Opinion: Parents are key in educating children

St. Petersburg Times

By: Bill Maxwell

September 11, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/columns/parents-are-key-in-educating-children/1190647>

Like many other school districts nationwide, the Pinellas County district is urgently trying to figure out how to help black students succeed academically. The countywide academic gap between blacks and their counterparts of other ethnic groups is dismal.

Officials want to identify teachers whose black students are succeeding — meaning students who are earning higher scores on standardized tests — and use these teachers' techniques to train other teachers whose students are not doing as well.

Earnest attempts to help black students succeed in school are fine, but we should be wary of efforts that leave out the responsibilities of black parents in educating their children.

For decades, scholars have studied the role of parents in children's learning, and their conclusions are clear. But because many scholars and educators are afraid of being accused of racism and cultural insensitivity, they rarely introduce their findings during public debates.

That's too bad, because parental involvement must become a natural part of the black esprit de corps if blacks are to keep their children from falling further behind in school.

Universally, people understand the importance of parental involvement. Some cultures practice it much better than others.

In some parts of the world, governments and government-supported organizations have adopted formal statements about parental involvement and the family. For example, the Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe, the official body that investigates issues for European nations and recommends solutions, spells out in unequivocal terms the role of parents.

"Education is, from birth to adulthood, a mixture of factors and influences," according to the council's directive titled Parents' and Teachers' Responsibilities in Children's Education. "Two institutions, however, play a pre-eminent role and have formal educational responsibilities before the law and society: the family and the school."

The council places the family ahead of the school for good reason: "Parents have always been and always will be the first educators of a child. They have the right and the duty to lay the intellectual and emotional bases for their children's lives, and to help develop their system of values and attitudes, particularly since a child's future is strongly conditioned during the preschool period. They must also exercise their responsibilities as parents of schoolchildren."

I fear that too many black parents fail to grasp the concept that they have a "duty" to lay the intellectual and emotional basis for their children's lives and to help develop their systems of values and attitudes.

Many low-income black parents, especially uneducated single mothers, are unprepared to effectively teach their children. To be

effective, parents must spend what experts call "quality time" with their children. The 1995 study "Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children" shows that the vocabularies of children of parents on welfare were smaller than those of children of professionals by an average of 1,537 words by age 3, primarily because professional parents naturally hold more positive and complex conversations with their children.

"The effects on future student academic achievement are very large — differences among children at entry into kindergarten in the skills that are a product of the home environment are more powerful predictors of future academic achievement than variables under the control of K-12," Grover Whitehurst, an expert on parental involvement with the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, told *Education Week* during a recent interview.

I was encouraged that recent census numbers show that more low-income black parents are involved in their children's education than a decade ago, this is in large part because of federal programs such as Reach Out and Read, Early Reading First and Reading is Fundamental.

A problem now is that funding for these programs has been slashed. Federal funding or not, black parents have a duty to be their children's first teacher. Until they understand and practice this universal concept, their children will continue to lag behind.

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STATE NEWS

Opinion: Time to end social promotion in New Mexico schools

Las Cruces Sun-News

By: Paul Gessing

September 12, 2011

http://www.lcsun-news.com/las_cruces-opinion/ci_18872251

A few years ago, we at the Rio Grande Foundation brought the "Florida Model" for K-12 education reform to New Mexico. The reforms enacted by then-Gov. Jeb Bush in Florida led to dramatic improvements in reading performance among Florida students.

Gov. Martinez has been pushing for some of the Florida-style reforms including the A-F school grading system which passed the Legislature earlier this year and is in the midst of being implemented. Bi-partisan legislation that would have prohibited social promotion (the passing of students from grade to grade regardless of their grasp of the material) of third graders was held up in the waning hours of the session by Majority Leader Michael Sanchez.

Why has the elimination of social promotion for third graders had a positive impact in education results? The idea behind it is that until third grade, students are learning to read. After that, they are reading to learn. So, a seventh grader who can't read is more highly-likely to drop out because their inability to read makes them unable to understand everything from their science book to the word problems on a math test.

A great, real-world example of this is the story of Michael Oher in the book and movie "The Blind Side." Oher, now an outstanding left-tackle in the NFL, was passed along in the Memphis Public Schools despite not attending class and being homeless. While I'm not asserting that ending social promotion would solve all of our societal and educational problems, the fact is that ending social promotion can function as a warning bell for parents, teachers, and students alike who may be alerted to the fact that some children are having problems learning.

Whether the response to that warning is heeded or not is ultimately up to parents, teachers, and students, but it is better than nothing.

So, ending social promotion is a no-brainer, right? From listening to the concerns of New Mexico legislators who are dedicated to preserving our state's 49th ranking in K-12 education, one might think that Gov. Martinez's plan to end social promotion was part of a harsh right-wing agenda to keep kids trapped in third grade.

Nothing could be further from the truth and it is not just conservative Republicans (and the Rio Grande Foundation) that support ending social promotion. How about that noted right-winger, former President Clinton? In the introduction to a Department of Education report on the issue, he said "I have fought for excellence, competition, and accountability in our nation's public schools, with more parental involvement, greater choice, better teaching, and an end to social promotion." And then there is the American Federation of Teachers which said in a union-published report, "Passing on Failure: District Promotion Policies and Practices:"

The practice of social promotion contributes to the very problems that can make it seem necessary. Promotion, in the absence of satisfactory academic performance, perpetuates academic failure by teaching students that effort and achievement are not important and that objective standards can not and will not be enforced. It forces classroom teachers to deal with an impossibly wide range of student knowledge, background, and readiness. And it denies students both the classroom and remedial resources that could help them reverse the pattern of academic failure.

The special legislation provides a great opportunity for the Legislature to move our state one big step closer to educational success. Certainly, redistricting must be the first priority, but it is hard to see that turning around New Mexico's dire education

results can be anything but a top priority for legislators.

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Rethinking high school

Columbus Dispatch

By: Charlie Boss

September 11, 2011

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2011/09/11/rethinking-high-school.html>

One high school means one set of students, athletic teams and traditions for an entire community.

But in districts with growing student populations, it also means that administrators have to find creative ways to ease the burden on overcrowded buildings without building a second high school — something many students, parents and residents oppose.

This year, Gahanna-Jefferson and Reynoldsburg opened second campuses to resolve their enrollment crunches while maintaining a one-high-school identity.

Their efforts, unique among Franklin County school districts, have led to partnerships with businesses and colleges and provide students with a new take on learning.

In Gahanna-Jefferson, a vacant Kroger alleviated the problem of overcrowding at Lincoln High School.

With the school near its 2,400-student capacity last year, and after state officials projected that the student body would outgrow the building, the district bought the grocery store across the street from the high school, razed it and built a 50,000-square-foot, three-story annex.

The \$20 million Clark Hall opened last month and houses classes for juniors and seniors who migrate between buildings throughout the day, crossing Hamilton and Havens Corner roads or taking a shuttle.

Most classes students take there are the same as those offered at the school's main building, but students say classes feel more like college.

During a Wednesday class, teacher Fred Donelson dispersed his students throughout the building to finish an online lab, letting them work in nooks built into walls, on armchairs lining the hallways or in conference rooms next to each room.

"The biggest thing is that we give them more independence," said Donelson, who teaches science.

But having a separate hall that's a nine-minute walk from some parts of the main building also can make students feel disconnected.

Desiree Parks, a senior, said she rarely sees her friends during the school day because they go to Clark Hall at different times and have different lunch periods.

"It's just a little bit of a bummer," the 17-year-old said.

Principal Dwight Carter said pep rallies and other schoolwide events will aim to maintain the one-school identity.

On the ground floor of the building, the district leases space to Columbus State Community College and the Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical School, where students can earn college credit. Officials expect those leases, along with two others for land next to the building that will house businesses and restaurants, to generate revenue for the district.

"The beauty of this building is that it will pay for itself," Treasurer Julio Valladares said.

Reynoldsburg High School still has one football team, one marching band, one student council and clubs for all 1,451 students to enjoy. But this year, students are spread across four academies on two sites.

The Livingston campus, at 6699 E. Livingston Ave., hosts HS {+2} (HS-squared), for students interested in the health sciences and human services; and Bell Academy, for those who want to know more about business, education, leadership and law.

The Summit campus, which opened this month on Summit Road between Main and Broad streets, houses Encore Academy, for arts, communication and design; and E-STEM, for science, technology, engineering and math.

Officials say the approach provides a more-personal experience for students while helping them think about their futures and identify their interests.

When Reynoldsburg officials approached voters in 2006 with a request for a \$56 million bond issue to build a second high school

and another elementary as well as renovate current buildings, residents were clear that they didn't want to split the high school, although they thought more space was needed.

At the time, the high school was designed for 1,280 students but housed 2,200, some of whom were attending classes in trailers. Voters approved the bond issue in 2008.

After gathering community input, district officials decided to organize the school in career-based academies, working with local universities, businesses and research organizations. They've also worked with local businesses and organizations to participate in classes and provide potential mentorship opportunities.

Each academy has a different approach, but all have set aside time for teachers to connect with small groups of students to discuss goals, academic progress and any other issues.

So far, the academy approach has garnered mixed reviews.

Freshman Hannah Harmon signed up for Bell because of her interest in criminal justice. But she would rather have classes with all freshmen under one roof.

"I have three friends at the other campus, and I don't get to see them until volleyball," she said. "I'm bummed."

Sophomore Sara Gordon, who attends Encore, likes how her classes are geared toward the arts and the familylike feel of the academy.

"I used to be disappointed going to school; now I'm excited," she said.

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Idaho ed board votes to require online classes

Associated Press

By: Jessie L. Bonner

September 9, 2011

<http://www.chron.com/news/article/Idaho-ed-board-votes-to-require-online-classes-2163471.php>

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho is a step closer to joining the handful of states that require students to take online courses.

The [state Board of Education](#) gave initial approval Friday to a rule requiring high school students to take at least two credits online to graduate, despite heavy opposition to the plan at public hearings across Idaho this summer.

Schools nationwide offer online classes but just three states — Alabama, Florida and Michigan — have adopted rules since 2006 to require online learning, according to the [International Association](#) of K-12 Online Learning in Washington, D.C. Proponents say online classes will help save money and help prepare students for college, where many courses are online. Opponents say they replace teachers with computers.

The online rules vary from state to state. Idaho would be the first to require two credits online.

Idaho's education board drafted the online course requirements as part of new education changes that were signed into law earlier this year with backing from public schools chief [Tom Luna](#) and Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter. Luna wanted students to take up to eight online course credits, but that provision was ditched during the 2011 session of the Idaho Legislature amid opposition from parents, teachers and some lawmakers.

An effort to require students to take four online credits was also ditched.

The legislation that was approved and signed into law instead directed the state Board of Education to draft standards governing the online course requirements. The board directed a subcommittee to decide how trustees would proceed in April and that panel mostly discussed making one or two online credits a requirement to graduate high school.

Most of the opposition was directed at the education changes as a whole not just the online requirements, board spokesman [Mark Browning](#) said.

Luna, who sits on the board, lauded trustees for their work on the rule that was approved Friday.

"I think that this proposal before us goes a long ways toward our responsibility as a board and as a state to assure that our students have the ability and the necessary skills that they will need when they graduate from high school," Luna said Friday before the board voted 8-0 to approve the plan

The board will now hold a 21-day comment period on the rule, though Browning says trustees are unlikely to reverse their decision. The rule will go before state lawmakers during the 2012 session, which starts in January.

Idaho is also introducing teacher merit pay and shifting money from salaries toward classroom technology, phasing in laptops for teachers and students, as part of Luna's education changes, which also limit union bargaining rights.

The changes were targeted in a referendum campaign earlier this year and will go before Idaho voters in November 2012.

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Wisconsin: Transparency plan for 'voucher tax' fast-tracked

Milwaukee Wisconsin Journal Sentinel

By: Karen Herzog

September 10, 2011

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/129596433.html>

A proposal that Milwaukee taxpayers be told on tax bills exactly how much of their money goes to private schools through the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is on the fast track for School Board consideration.

The board's Committee on Legislation, Rules and Policies will discuss the proposal at a meeting Tuesday night. The proposal was sent to the committee during a special MPS board meeting Saturday that focused on the district's long-range master plan for buildings.

Board member Larry Miller asked that his "voucher tax" transparency proposal be discussed Tuesday, rather than wait to be introduced at the board's next regular board meeting Sept. 22, and then be referred to committee at a later date. The board suspended its rules by a 7-0 vote Saturday to allow the proposal to take the fast track for discussion.

"The urgency of this is there's a huge tax burden on the community and it's important for the community to be educated on this burden," Miller told the board Saturday.

The tax that MPS must levy under state law to support low-income Milwaukee students enrolled in private schools under the choice program would have ranked just behind Milwaukee Area Technical College and ahead of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District if it had been broken out, ranked and displayed under the "Levy by Unit of Government" section of tax information sent to taxpayers in 2010, Miller said.

Miller wants the School Board to ask the city comptroller to specify the portion of the MPS tax levy that goes to private schools through the choice program on 2011 tax bills.

By state law, MPS in fiscal 2011 was required to levy more than \$50 million in taxes to subsidize private schools in the Milwaukee school choice program, over which MPS has no authority or control, Miller's resolution says.

This "irrational agreement" forces the district to levy what has come to be known as the "voucher tax," and results in over 17% of the tax levy attributable to MPS going to non-MPS schools, Miller says.

The choice program, in place for 20 years, offers vouchers worth \$6,442 for each low-income student in Milwaukee who wants to attend a private school, including a religious school, at taxpayer expense. About 20,000 students enrolled in the Milwaukee program in 2010-'11.

Because of a number of policy changes within the recently passed state budget, Milwaukee's "voucher tax" is likely to rise significantly, and may exceed the state's official estimate of \$53.4 million in fiscal 2012, Miller said.

"Taxpayers in the city of Milwaukee have a right to transparent and open government, which includes clear and readily available information about where their property tax dollars are being sent," Miller said in his resolution.

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