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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/19/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Specialists Weigh Common Social Studies Standards**

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

May 18, 2011

[HTTP://WWW.EDWEEK.ORG/EW/ARTICLES/2011/05/18/32SOCIALSTUDIES.H30.HTML?TKN=ORYFCASTNKFZPQNM7E03HLSQU99KSRNXXEAR&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/05/18/32socialstudies.h30.html?TKN=ORYFCASTNKFZPQNM7E03HLSQU99KSRNXXEAR&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK)

Feeling that social studies has been sidelined by a test-driven focus on math and English/language arts, subject-matter specialists from more than a dozen states are meeting this week with representatives of content-area groups to brainstorm ways to improve academic standards in that subject.

The two-day gathering in Charlotte, N.C., is the third convened in the last year and a half as states and social studies groups seek to re-establish the prominent role they feel the disciplines deserve in classrooms. Social studies specialists from 18 states and officials of 15 social studies organizations have been taking part in the talks.

Organizers of the effort refer to it as work on "[common state standards in social studies](#)," but participants' discussions are not "predetermined" to produce a set of standards for state adoption, said Kathleen Swan, an associate professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Kentucky's college of education, who is organizing the discussions.

While the talks might produce model standards, they are primarily geared toward developing resources states can share, such as a set of guidelines or core principles, and serving as a forum for states and content-area groups to discuss improving states' own standards, she said.

"It's more an effort of people talking about how they can make their own states' [standards] better by working together," Ms. Swan said. "If we end up converging in a way that makes sense for a common set of standards, then that's where we converge." The conversations have been unfolding through a [social studies group](#) within the Council of Chief State School Officers. It's one of the CCSSO "[collaboratives](#)" that serve as forums for representatives of states to discuss issues in specific topic areas, including assessment, special education, mathematics, and career and technical education.

#### *A Different Path*

But while the social studies collaborative has been the forum for the discussions, the CCSSO is not working to create an initiative for common social studies standards, said Chris Minnich, who oversees the CCSSO's collaboratives. The CCSSO and the National Governors Association organized states in 2009 in the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which produced a set of math and English/language arts [standards](#) that have now been adopted by 44 states and the District of Columbia. "Our board has been very clear that they're not interested in leading the social studies work in the same way we've led the common core in math and English/language arts," said Mr. Minnich. "We're hopeful that states working together can write social studies standards as they would like to. Some states are interested in upgrading their standards, and that is what we are interested in helping support. We are not part of the development as we were with the common standards [in math and English/language arts]."

To spearhead the common-standards work in English and math two years ago, the education chiefs and governors of nearly

every state signed memorandums of agreement pledging to support the initiative, Mr. Minnich noted, something that has not been done with the social studies work. A spokeswoman for the NGA said that organization is not involved in the new social studies work.

Social studies groups had wanted their subject to be part of the common-standards work in 2009, but the CCSSO and the NGA declined, choosing instead to focus on only two core subjects, Mr. Minnich said. Math and English/language arts were a “logical place to start,” in recognition of the size of the undertaking and limited resources, as well as “where most of the accountability in schools” is located, he said.

Others in the field have speculated that the potential controversy of social studies standards offered another reason to restrict that initiative to math and literacy.

The CCSSO’s board wants to stay focused on fully implementing the math and English/language arts standards, Mr. Minnich said, “and there is still a lot of work to do to make sure the standards are translated into classrooms across the United States.”

### *Sensitive Topic*

The creation of social studies standards, common or otherwise, has often touched off controversy. Recent battles over standards content in Texas and North Carolina have grabbed headlines, and a set of voluntary national history standards commissioned by the National Endowment for the Humanities in the early 1990s sparked opposition that derailed the project. (See inset.)

Christopher T. Cross, a former assistant U.S. education secretary who was the president of the Council for Basic Education when that group assembled two panels in 1995 to revise the national history standards, had some advice for those working on the new project.

“I would be very cautious about moving forward with common standards in this field,” he said. “It’s a field that is subject to a lot of political scrutiny.”

If he were advising the group, he would urge it to design documents that capture the key ideas of the field, steering clear of more detailed knowledge requirements, he said.

“When you get down to that grain size, you’re going to do nothing but invite the kind of scrutiny that complicated things last time,” Mr. Cross said. “If you develop them at a higher level, with key principles, perhaps, then they’re more apt to get more general support than if you try and cover everything under the sun.”

Such broad guidelines can still be useful to educators, Mr. Cross said, by serving as a “skeleton” on which they can create more detailed plans that reflect their own states’ perspectives on the social studies.

An early catalyst of the current shared work on social studies standards, Ms. Swan of the University of Kentucky said, was the required testing in reading and math under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which sparked concern that other subjects are shortchanged as states face consequences for poor achievement in the two tested subjects.

The combination of recent budget crunches that led to cutbacks in nontested areas; federal officials’ rhetoric about the importance of science, technology, engineering, and math, known as the STEM subjects; and the exclusion of social studies from the common-core-standards movement has made social studies teachers feel their subjects have been “marginalized,” Ms. Swan said.

The current talks came together “synergistically,” she said, as the field began asking how social studies could regain a strong place in classrooms. Those conversations had been unfolding among state social studies specialists at the meetings of the CCSSO social studies collaborative, and among representatives of content-area groups associated with the [National Council of the Social Studies](#). The NCSS—an umbrella group for teachers of social studies disciplines, including history, civics, geography, and economics—joined together in discussions with state specialists and 14 groups from related disciplines.

So far, the group has agreed on a one-sentence definition of K-12 social studies: “The social studies is an interdisciplinary exploration of the social sciences and humanities, including civics, history, economics, and geography, in order to develop responsible, informed, and engaged citizens and to foster civic, global, historical, geographic, and economic literacy.”

The definition “acknowledges the importance of the individual disciplines, affirms how and why they are connected,” and includes the skills widely referred to as “21st-century skills,” according to a statement on the [NCSS website](#). Known by many descriptors, those skills include such abilities as global awareness, critical thinking, and collaboration.

### *Consensus Challenging*

Going beyond a definition to guidelines or standards quickly gets difficult as states’ and disciplines’ differing priorities and viewpoints come into play, Ms. Swan said.

“The issues are thorny,” she said. “What does it mean to be a social studies student in Nebraska versus a social studies student in South Carolina? How do we think about historical thinking in the context of the interdisciplinary foundation of the social studies? Those aren’t easy questions historically, and there are different perspectives.”

Given the sensitivities involved, making sure groups from the various social studies disciplines are at the table to discuss standards is important, said Fritz Fischer, who, as the chairman of the National Council for History Education, is participating in the conversations.

“It’s important that the groups representing the different disciplines work together to create the best possible guidelines for teaching and learning in our disciplines,” said Mr. Fischer, a professor of history and history education at the University of Northern Colorado.

Some states are hoping that the group produces standards in time to use in their own scheduled revisions.

In the wake of a 2009 law requiring Kentucky to revise all its standards by the end of 2010, that state adopted the common standards in math and English/language arts in February of last year—the first state to do so. It is looking to the collaborative effort for help on social studies.

“We are so excited about this work,” said Felicia C. Smith, an associate commissioner of education in Kentucky. “We’re hoping that by this time next year, we’ll have social studies standards. We’ve communicated our timeline and the need to move ahead.” Others presume a far slower timeline.

“I doubt they’ll come out with anything real soon,” said a social studies consultant who is monitoring the talks but not

participating, and asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the work. "We are supposed to begin our standards review in the fall, and we're moving ahead with our own process."

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## Duncan Inserts Himself in La. Schools Chief Debate

Associated Press

By: Staff

May 18, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/05/18/429704\\_ap.html?r=308051063](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/05/18/429704_ap.html?r=308051063)

*Baton Rouge, La.* – U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has inserted himself into Louisiana's debate over its next school superintendent.

At least two state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education members said Wednesday they have received calls from Duncan about John White, the newly hired leader of the Recovery School District and Gov. Bobby Jindal's choice to be interim state superintendent.

BESE member Linda Johnson said Duncan praised White's background and experience, but stopped short of asking her to vote for him. "He didn't say, 'You've got to support this man'," Johnson said.

Board member Louella Givens also said she received a message from Duncan, an appointee of President Barack Obama, wanting to talk about White but hasn't returned the call.

Duncan spokesman Justin Hamilton said the secretary "thinks that John White is an extraordinary leader and is committed to reform and is a great asset to the state."

A Jindal spokesman said the Republican governor's administration asked Duncan to call BESE members about White's credentials.

"Secretary Duncan has good things to say about John White. He offered to help, and we asked him to let BESE members know. We appreciate his interest in supporting our ongoing reform efforts," Jindal press secretary Kyle Plotkin wrote in an e-mail.

Jindal's proposal for White to run the RSD and be interim superintendent has divided the 11 board members who will choose the superintendent. Johnson and Givens, along with others, oppose hiring White as interim superintendent. It takes eight votes on the 11-member board to hire a superintendent.

The job is open because Paul Pastorek, a lawyer, resigned last week to take a position as general counsel for an aerospace and defense company. A day later, Jindal threw his support to White.

White, 35, came to the RSD job earlier this month to manage failing public schools taken over by the state, mostly in New Orleans. He was a former deputy superintendent of New York City schools and former executive director of Teach For America in Chicago. He taught high school English in Newark, N.J., and Chicago for the organization. He has never run a school district. After White's RSD hiring was announced, Duncan called White a passionate and committed education leader. He said he'd worked with White in Chicago and New Orleans was lucky to have him.

The president of one of Louisiana's teacher unions criticized Duncan's phone calls as "political bullying."

"Gov. Jindal continues to put undue pressure on BESE members in an attempt to force them to change their opinion to support Mr. White for the interim state superintendent, and this needs to stop," said Joyce Haynes, head of the Louisiana Association of Educators and a frequent Jindal critic, in a statement.

White hasn't committed to wanting the state job, saying instead he would consider it if BESE made the request.

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## The Upside of Class Size Reduction

Education Next

By: Eric A. Hanushek

May 19, 2011

<http://educationnext.org/the-upside-of-class-size-reduction/>

Class size is again in the media across the country, this time because of increases in class size related to fiscal cutbacks. Instead of discussing the achievement gains that would come from class size reduction, the current commentary has focused on the calamity for public schools that will necessarily follow from increases in class size. The discussions, while ever-tinged by politics, ignore the fact that increases are not symmetric to decreases.

The rhetoric of class size policy has been virtually constant for the decade-and-a-half before this year. If one carefully culls the research literature, it is possible to find a set of studies that conclude that achievement will improve with smaller classes. It did not take much of a sales pitch to convince parents, school officials, and legislators that everything should be done to bring class sizes down further, resulting in a steady decrease in class size. And with the help of federal stimulus funds, most districts managed to keep prior reductions, even as state fiscal conditions deteriorated. Handing out pink slips to teachers in the spring (and rescinding them later) was the perennial political maneuver to ensure that education takes small if any funding cuts.

Until now. Without further federal stimulus, and without recovery from the recession, schools have begun to feel the budget pressure for the very first time, and the obvious way to deal with any budget slowdown (or actual reduction) is to let class sizes drift up a little. But this has reinvigorated the political efforts to hold education harmless from any fiscal exigencies. This situation has led to repeated news media coverage of classrooms with students sitting in the hallways, of testimonials about

how it has become impossible to teach fractions with so many students, of how ten years ago they could grade papers but no longer, of . . . . It has also led to the class size reduction lobbyists quoting back their evidence with the twist of how this is the worst thing that could happen to schools.

Why is an increase different than a reduction? When reducing class size, one must hire more teachers, which means that the school system will essentially get a random draw that is expected to yield an average teacher. But increasing class size means that some current teachers must be laid off, and here the schools have a tremendous advantage. They know how effective their teachers are, so they are not forced to lay off an average teacher. They can, in fact, lay off below average teachers.

Laying off the worst teachers would lead to dramatic *improvements* in student achievement. As I have [described elsewhere](#), replacing the worst 5-8 percent of our teachers with average teachers would be expected to move student outcomes near to—if not at—the top of the international league tables for math and science performance. And this would have enormous benefits for the U.S. economy and for the students who now have greater skills when they enter the labor force.

But wouldn't the increased class sizes offset any gains? In simplest terms, no. The evidence has been rehashed many times. The latest [Brookings study](#), for example, concludes once again that the small class size increases from the current fiscal pressures would be virtually undetectable.

Part of the confusion and dissonance over the outcomes arises from the unwillingness (or inability) of schools to make decisions based on the effectiveness of teachers. By [applying LIFO rules](#) (last in, first out) to any dismissals, schools almost completely eliminate the chance to improve the learning of our children. Specifically, they insure that the largest number of teachers is laid off, while not affecting the average quality of the teaching force.

Moreover, the difficulties are reinforced by news media stories (which appear to be getting data from each other's stories) that breathlessly cite classes of 45, 50, and even 60. To the extent that these reports are accurate, we might even applaud the decisions. One of the biggest problems of the class size reduction movement was that it called for laws and regulations that insisted on uniform reductions without regard to the particular classes, students, and teachers and without regard to where large classes might be appropriate and where small classes might be appropriate. With increases, school decision makers can at least avoid these damaging rules and can make the changes where they have the least impact on students.

Any such large classes are truly decisions that schools are making. To obtain a five percent savings in budget, schools must typically let average student-teacher ratios drift up by less than one student per teacher. This would put student-teacher ratios back roughly to where they were five or six years ago – larger yes, but hardly the dark ages. It certainly does not require a doubling of class sizes, as some of the media accounts might suggest. The real data show that student-teacher ratios and class sizes have been falling throughout the past decade – and the recent changes are not in any way simply a continuation of a long slide toward larger classes.

Doing the right thing does require active decision making by schools and policy makers. Some of this may become easier as legislatures in Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, and more revisit the rules on hiring, retention, and school decision making. But it is not automatic.

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **Hillsborough School Board members defend \$900,000 for iPads**

St. Petersburg Times

By: Tom Marshall

May 19, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/hillsborough-school-board-members-defend-900000-for-ipads/1170423>

TAMPA — Even in a tough budget year, it's hard to resist the lure of innovative technology.

That's what Hillsborough County School Board members are saying as questions roll in about their decision to put an Apple iPad in the hands of every student and teacher at two Tampa middle schools next year.

It will cost about \$900,000 in federal grant money for about 900 devices and training.

"I know there's been an uproar from the community over this," said member Stacy White, who joined the unanimous vote at Tuesday's School Board meeting. "And I know I ran as a fiscal conservative and promised to be a budget hawk. I really agonized over this one."

But he said the potential benefits for the pilot program at Franklin and Ferrell middle schools — both slated to open next fall as single-gender magnet academies — could outweigh the costs for the district.

"Because in today's world you have to be familiar with technology," White said. "I think it's important for students to learn how to properly use technology from a trained teacher."

Jose Colindres, chief operating officer of a social service agency in Westchase, told the board Tuesday he supported that goal. But he was taken aback by the lack of detail in the agenda item, which didn't indicate just how much "above \$50,000" the plan

would actually cost.

"As a board, I ask you to be very responsive and open," he said. "Taking back your authority, not delegating it out, being accountable to the people."

At Tuesday's meeting, middle school curriculum director Josie Sanders said the device's many applications — from astronomy to history movies — will energize students. For now, they won't replace textbooks.

"It will connect them to real-life situations, not just pages in a book," she said.

The devices normally retail for between \$350 and \$600, but the district's per-unit price of \$1,004 includes staff training and other services. They will be purchased using federal Title 1 and Magnet Schools Assistance Program grants.

District officials did not respond Wednesday to requests for more detail about the project.

Board members said they asked the staff hard questions about the iPads in private meetings, and still had some a day after their vote.

"How are you going to integrate them into the curriculum?" wondered chairwoman Doretha Edgecomb. "What kind of training are you going to use, and how will this impact learning? Because we've got a prescribed curriculum in middle school."

But she voiced support for the effort, saying it would make the new magnet programs "attractive and innovative, and not like every other school in the district."

Franklin has struggled under the state's accountability system in recent years, earning multiple C grades but failing to post adequate improvements among some student groups. Ferrell has also earned C grades, and more than 80 percent of students in each school qualify for a free or reduced-fee lunch.

By converting into single-gender academies, both schools get a fresh start under the state system. And they'll recruit students from across the district, rather than just from their central Tampa neighborhoods.

"Magnets are expensive, and the only way they stay successful is if they're unique," said board member Jack Lamb.

He said district staffers see the iPads as a factor that will help draw students to the schools.

The district rushed the purchase onto the agenda, he said, to take advantage of upcoming staff training opportunities.

Experts say training will be essential if the district hopes to make the devices an integral part of the curriculum, rather than a flashy gimmick.

"The district should be thinking about, 'How are we doing it that's authentic and meaningful, and how is it leading toward students achieving and meeting the learning objectives?' " said Christopher Sessums, a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Florida.

Kara Dawson, an associate professor of educational technology, said Hillsborough needs to explain its goals clearly to the public. "If I were a parent choosing a school, I would say, 'This is awesome. But what are you going to do with them?' "

Done properly, she said, it's not such a rash move to put expensive technology directly in students' hands.

"I do think that one-to-one technical devices of some kind are definitely on the horizon for K-12 schools, whether it be iPads or netbooks or laptops," Dawson said.

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## **Walton schools named high performing; Okaloosa wasn't, may have to change start date**

Northwest Florida Daily News

By: Katie Tammen

May 18, 2011

<http://www.nwfdailynews.com/news/one-40267-performing-walton.html>

Only one local school district was designated high performing this week by the Florida Department of Education.

Walton County was one of the 13 districts across the state to meet all the criteria for the designation, according to a news release from the FDOE.

"I was able to announce it last night at the board meeting and it felt so good," Walton County Superintendent of Schools Carlene Anderson said Wednesday morning.

Walton County has been named a high performing district for the last five years.

In order to qualify for the designation, the district must earn an A-grade from the state for academics, have a clean audit and

comply with Florida's Class Size Amendment.

"This year is special because they keep raising the bar," Anderson said. "And we somehow, through the efforts of our students and staff and administrators, we keep making it. (It's) a lot of work, a lot of hard work."

Neighboring Okaloosa County, which was a high-performing district last year, did not meet all the criteria after one small school received an F grade.

The school, Emerald Coast Career Institute South, was closed more than a year ago and only had about 34 students when it received the grade, said Superintendent of Schools Alexis Tibbetts.

Tibbetts said the school district is appealing FDOE's decision to not designate the district as high performing.

Trouble could arise if the state doesn't revise its decision because the district's school start date for 2011-12 would violate Florida law.

In March, a divided School Board voted to start classes Aug. 5 under the assumption that the district would still be considered high performing.

According to state law, a district maintains a high-performing designation for three years unless it has a school that earns an F grade. Any districts that are not identified as high performing cannot begin classes any earlier than two weeks before Labor Day.

When Okaloosa's 2011-12 calendar was being developed, several district officials raised concerns with FDOE staffers because the School Board was approving a calendar before the list of high-performing districts was released, said School Board Chairman Rodney Walker.

"We were led to believe it wasn't going to be no problem because supposedly other districts had been in similar situations (in the past)... and they allowed them to do it even though they fell off being one of the top performing districts," Walker said.

Now that the list has been released, Okaloosa is looking at its options, he said.

Walker said he is recommending that a new calendar that would meet the letter of the law be developed this week and go before the board at its meeting Monday night in Crestview.

"We'd be better to just assume we need to change it now so the parents and the kids and everybody can make their plans," he said.

According to state education officials, the district must make that change if its appeal isn't approved. The timelines for the appeals process vary.

"Okaloosa School Board currently does not have the authority to waive the school start date in 2011 and they have known for some time that it is unlikely that the district would continue to be high performing.

"As a part of the State Board's oversight enforcement authority, the Department has the authority to investigate a district's noncompliance with educational laws and rules," according to an emailed statement from the FDOE to the Daily News.

"If a violation is found, the consequences can include reporting to the Legislature, reducing discretionary lottery appropriation and declaring the district ineligible for competitive grants. However, it is expected that the district will revise the start date to comply with the requirements of the law," according to the statement.

Santa Rosa County Schools did not make the high-performing list, either. However, officials set the first day of school for the end of August rather than the beginning, so they don't have a conflict.

Santa Rosa didn't make the list because it had a few minor citations in its audit and didn't meet class size limits. The failure had nothing to do with academics, Superintendent of Schools Tim Wyrosdick said.

"High performance (designation) ... is not solely determined by academic performance," Wyrosdick said. "Academically we are there and have been there."

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## **STATE NEWS**

# **Republican leaders say teacher dismissal bill has first priority in Alabama Legislature**

Associated Press

By: Bob Johnson

May 18, 2011

<http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/view/story/398e1e3a7b2f4d96b2f90c70ee44e728/AL-XGR--Firing-Teachers/>

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Republican leaders in the Alabama House and Senate said Wednesday that the first priority when the Legislature returns next week from a two-week break will be to pass a bill that streamlines the process school boards must follow to fire a teacher or other education employee.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn and Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh at a Statehouse news conference urged legislators to immediately pass the bill without amending it. The measure, which has been a priority for the Legislature's new Republican leadership, revamps the appeals process for teachers who have been fired or disciplined. The bill passed the Senate shortly before lawmakers took a two-week break to hold hearings on redrawing Congressional and school board districts.

Hubbard and Marsh said the bill prevents teachers from being fired for political or personal reasons, but makes it easier to fire them for incompetence or for breaking the law.

Currently if a fired teacher appeals, the case is heard by a federal arbitrator. The proposed legislation calls for retired Alabama judges to hear the appeals. The legislation would effect the dismissal process in grades K-12 and in Alabama's community colleges.

Hubbard said lawmakers want to pass the bill quickly, so that school boards and community colleges can "have the flexibility they need before the school year ends."

But House Minority Leader Rep. Craig Ford, D-Gadsden, said Democrats will attempt to amend the legislation and are expected to use delaying tactics when the bill comes up in the House, most likely on Wednesday.

"We're going to try to stand up and protect teachers' rights," Ford said.

He said he considers the bill one of several pushed by the new Republican leadership as a "vendetta" against the state teacher's union, the Alabama Education Association. Other Republican-backed bills that Democrats considered as aimed at the AEA included a measure to make teachers pay more on their retirement and a bill preventing state employees and teachers from having dues to organizations like the AEA taken out of their pay by payroll deduction.

State Schools Superintendent Joe Morton said he thinks it's fair that the bill gives both the hiring and firing authority to local school boards.

"It's a fair resolution for a very difficult problem," Morton said.

AEA spokesman David Stout said the bill "has serious flaws" including language that he said gives deference to the school board and superintendents in appeal hearings. He said the bill is complicated and he is concerned most lawmakers have not read it.

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## North Carolina Senate leader lays out schools plan

Raleigh News Observer

By: Jane Stancill

May 19, 2011

<http://www.newsobserver.com/2011/05/19/1208103/senate-leader-lays-out-schools.html>

Related Stories Senate Republicans have new ideas for public schools in North Carolina, and their coming budget proposal aims to reshape early-grade classrooms, teacher pay models and even the school calendar.

Budget writers are working this week to refine their proposed spending plan for the coming year. It's due out next week, but Wednesday, Senate Leader Phil Berger described what big changes would be ahead for the public education system in North Carolina.

Among the ideas:

Cutting teacher assistants, possibly in all but kindergarten classes.

Shrinking class size in grades 1-3, toward a goal of a 15-to-1 student-teacher ratio.

Paying teachers based on performance instead of seniority.

Extending students' school year by five days (by converting teacher workdays to instructional days).

"The system that we've got is not working right now," Berger said, citing graduation rates, remedial college courses and the fact that 23 percent of third-graders are not reading on grade level.

The goal is improving early grades, Berger said, and making sure children can read by the time they leave third grade. If children are struggling at the end of second grade, they should be placed in an intensive reading environment for third grade, he said, and should not be promoted until they are proficient readers.

"The most important thing we can do for students, particularly students in the earlier classrooms, is to have a qualified teacher in front of those students," he said. "Couple that with the importance of that qualified teacher having fewer students, rather than more students. We think that those are just keys to building a successful education system."

Cutting the teaching assistants will free money to begin to shrink class size in first through third grades, Berger said. Getting to a 15-1 ratio will take time, but he hopes to get that done within four years.

Berger's staff zeroed in on a widely cited Tennessee study of class size, which showed small classes produced better results for children, compared to normal-size classes or normal classes with a teacher assistant.

#### *Reaction from educators*

Education leaders say lowering class size could make a big difference.

"I am for any measure that is based in research, and we know the smaller the classes we have in kindergarten through grade 3, the more time the teacher can spend with each child," said June Atkinson, state superintendent of public instruction. "What I've seen in research is lowering it by one student or two students would not have a dramatic impact, so you've got to lower it sufficiently."

Others said the picture is more complicated than class size.

"Do I support students reading by third grade? Absolutely," said Bill McNeal, who as Wake superintendent had a literacy plan with that goal in 2003 and 2008.

But, McNeal, now executive director of N.C. Association of School Administrators, said teacher assistants, many of whom have degrees, are often a vital part of youngsters learning to read.

"Somehow there seems to be a little bit of a contradiction when I see the TA being removed, when in some cases, those people work as a second classroom teacher," he said.

#### *Painful reductions*

The Senate budget plan is expected to cut deeper into K-12 education than the House's \$19.3 billion plan, which reduces public school spending by 8.8 percent. Officials with the state Department of Public Instruction say more than 18,000 public school positions could be lost in the House plan, but that number could grow to more than 20,000 in the Senate plan. Layoff notices have begun in school districts around the state.

The proposed cuts have caused an uproar in the education establishment.

The N.C. Association of Educators, the state teachers group, has warned that if the cuts are enacted, the state risks falling to near bottom in the nation in per pupil spending. The state now ranks 46th, according to the National Education Association.

Berger said he's not caught up in rankings of expenditures. He just wants to create a plan that works.

"If it's successful, it will win fair-minded people over," Berger said. "Unfortunately the debate about education in North Carolina has concentrated on who's spending more money, without an appropriate analysis of where the dollars are going and whether or not we are getting any bang for our buck or any success for the dollars that are being spent."

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## **Special integrated schools struggling to make the grade**

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At Harambee Elementary in Maplewood, cultural diversity soaks into almost every lesson, activity and classroom discussion. A "community cultures specialist" tours classes to make sure students are working across racial lines and learning about multiple world view perspectives. Kindergartners use crayons in numerous shades of skintone to draw accurate pictures of themselves. "We don't shy away from having conversations about race and the way we treat each other," said Harambee Principal Kristine Black.

But Harambee and the metro area's other voluntary integration programs are under intensifying pressure to show more than racial harmony among their 13,000 students. At a time when student achievement is a top priority, two out of the metro area's three integration districts have failed to make the academic progress required under federal law. Some districts have pulled out.

Their future darkened even more Wednesday when the Legislature passed a K-12 appropriation that sliced more than a third of the funding for the integration districts.

Republican leaders argue that state funding for integration will be \$64 million this year alone, but has yielded too few solid results and would instead direct money toward efforts to raise achievement and reward districts that show success teaching kids to read.

Black hopes that won't happen. "To just eliminate the funding feels shortsighted," said Black. "This is long-term work that we're

doing. It's a really complex problem and it's going to need comprehensive solutions."

*13,000 students, \$25 million*

Minnesota's special integration schools were born in 1997, after the state overhauled its desegregation program.

The West Metro Education Program (WMEP) created a downtown school and the FAIR fine arts magnet in Crystal to attract students from Minneapolis and neighboring suburbs. The East Metro Integration District (EMID) created Harambee and the Crosswinds arts/science magnet in Woodbury for St. Paul and its neighboring districts.

In 2001, the Northwest Suburban Integration School District formed when Brooklyn Center joined St. Paul and Minneapolis as a "racially isolated" district. It has worked with existing schools rather than building new ones.

The integration districts spent around \$25.2 million last year. Most came from its member districts' integration revenue, education tax dollars that follow students, and state and federal grants. The money pays for academic programs, cultural-awareness training for teachers, social services and transportation.

The three districts have shown success in getting families to participate. Of the districts' approximately 13,000 students, about half are white, and about half are low-income.

"My children have gained a certain level of confidence and they're comfortable around all types of people," said Demond Bryant, an African-American who lives in Cottage Grove and sends his two children to Harambee.

*A look at the scores*

But strong academic results have been more difficult to show.

For example, fewer students at Harambee were proficient in reading and math last year than at Cowern Elementary, a North St. Paul neighborhood school with similar demographics that did make academic progress under federal law.

Dissatisfied with the results, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale withdrew from EMID in 2009, taking back its \$1 million annual contribution. Mahtomedi also withdrew.

"We wanted our integration dollars to impact more of our students," said Tom Howley, North St. Paul's equity coordinator.

A Star Tribune analysis of state test score data shows that minority students from Minneapolis and St. Paul clearly score better in the special integration schools than do the minority students in their home districts.

But results for suburban students are mixed.

Fifty-four percent of minority students at EMID were proficient in reading, more than the nearly 43 percent in St. Paul. For WMEP, almost 66 percent of minority students were proficient in reading, compared with 36 percent in Minneapolis.

The achievement gap between white and minority students persisted, but narrowed in the integration schools. There remains a 38 percent difference between white and black students proficient in reading in St. Paul, compared to a 20 percent difference at EMID. Minneapolis showed a 50 percent difference between students of color and white students' proficiency rate while WMEP only has a 23 percent difference.

But the picture changes when east suburban districts are compared to EMID's integration schools. There the integration schools' minority students rated below those in the regular school districts in both reading and math proficiency.

*Achievement now a goal*

Student achievement wasn't an explicit goal of the integration schools in the beginning, school officials say. That didn't happen until 2008, three years after the Legislative Auditor reported that integration aid lacked a clear goal, and that neither the state nor schools adequately assess its results.

"I think we need greater clarity and greater accountability," said Kathy Griebel, director of instructional services for EMID. "Everyone's looking for the right answer."

Northwest Suburban Integration School District executive director Mark Robertson said schools need time and, possibly, more money to address that, he said.

"They tell us that we're failing but they don't tell us what to go after," he said. "It's not sensible to me."

Robertson said his integration district likely would fold if Gov. Mark Dayton approves the funding cuts. Most of the school districts would discontinue most of the programs jumpstarted by the Northwest Integration District.

"It's not a trust thing," Robertson said. "I just don't think they can. They don't have the resources."

Integration schools are "not immune to improvement," said Jerry Robicheau, EMID's interim superintendent.

"I think the challenge is how do you truly integrate?" he said. "Just having students sit in classroom that's multicultural is one thing but how do you really create an inclusive environment that deals with all students?"

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