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NATIONAL NEWS

Virtual Education Seeks Right Fit for Special Populations

Education Week

By: Ian Quillen

August 22, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-research.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-research.h31.html?tkn=MLSFex8HclE8mSeMmXLVC%2FcuBxp4Z7W%2FmFG8&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH)

[tkn=MLSFex8HclE8mSeMmXLVC%2FcuBxp4Z7W%2FmFG8&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-research.h31.html?tkn=MLSFex8HclE8mSeMmXLVC%2FcuBxp4Z7W%2FmFG8&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH)

Researchers have found that, in the right circumstances, it is possible for students from special populations to complete an online class and demonstrate as much academic learning as those who completed a face-to-face course.

They caution, however, that using that conclusion to justify any particular online learning option for special education, English-language-learner, at-risk, and gifted students in need of an intervention is perilous, at best.

“We don’t really know at this point which [methods] tend to be the most effective” for specific populations, said Cathy Cavanaugh, a professor of educational technology at the University of Florida, in Gainesville, who was co-author of a study about improving outcomes for virtual school students with disabilities that was published last year. “We need to get to a much more fine-grained level of understanding of what’s going on,” she said.

Yet the small cadre of researchers who focus on online K-12 education believe making their case to the public for more nuanced research, as well as gaining support and funding for it, can be difficult, says Michael K. Barbour, an assistant professor of technology at Wayne State University, in Detroit.

“The problem is, most academic journals, most policymakers, and most people in the press want to find usable nuggets that can be used in other situations,” said Mr. Barbour, whose research includes a 2008 dissertation exploring rural online education in Newfoundland and Labrador, in Canada.

“What we need is not large, generalizable studies,” he said. “What we need is for research and evaluators to work with programs in a design-research model.”

Mr. Barbour insists there are significant imperfections inherent in most broad studies of online learning for special populations and, indeed, in studies of online learning in general.

For example, he said, some past studies have sometimes compared the achievement data of virtual students who chose virtual learning on their own against a general sampling of brick-and-mortar students. Other studies—such as research that has found students with autism perform better on standardized tests after receiving online instruction—have used a narrow measure of educational quality based largely on standardized-testing results, he said.

Mr. Barbour argues that shifting from wide-ranging, short-term studies to narrower, more in-depth explorations designed to solve

a problem at a specific online program would be a more effective method of research. And with wide disparities between how special populations of students are educated in online programs across the nation, he says, narrower research may provide more meaningful feedback than broader studies that attempt to make comparisons of dissimilar data.

“If I can solve a problem with Michigan Virtual School,” he said by way of example, “at the end of the day, I’m going to come up with a conceptual framework, a theoretical framework, to explain why what we did eventually worked.”

Uniform Data Scarce

A lack of data uniformity is one obstacle preventing apt comparisons, says Richard E. Ferdig, a professor of research and information technology at Kent State University, in northeastern Ohio. He is the founder of the Virtual School Clearinghouse, a collaborative research project designed to collect data on the field.

For example, Mr. Ferdig says, getting hold of data from virtual schools is a problem, because most online schools serve students as a supplement to those students’ coursework at regular schools, and report academic data to those schools.

And in many cases, he says, virtual schools’ identification of students who make up special populations is imperfect at best. Even though research suggests virtual schools are serving a greater proportion of students with special needs (except for English-language learners) than brick-and-mortar schools are, those students and their parents may not identify themselves as such when they enroll. In fact, many often embrace a virtual option to avoid identification as one of those student population groups.

“There’s this paradox,” said Mr. Ferdig, who has researched online education as a measure for reaching students at risk of dropping out of school, most recently with work published in 2010 that studied such interventions at the Michigan Virtual School, which serves courses to about 16,000 students. “You want to give kids the support they need,” he said. “But at the same time, you also want to value the anonymity online learning provides.”

Structure and Organization

Leanna Archambault, an assistant professor of education at Arizona State University, in Tempe, says because virtual education is still new and developing, research also needs to expand its focus to solve questions of structure and organization.

Those questions include how virtual schools can construct intervention programs that mirror those that reach out to English-language learners, at-risk students, gifted students, and students with disabilities in brick-and-mortar schools. And it also includes educating teachers who will be ready to deal with those challenges in a virtual environment.

“The questions are not only concerns on an instructional level, but on a programmatic level, and at the school level [about] what needs to happen,” said Ms. Archambault, who is hoping to combine her past exploration of at-risk online learners with her expertise in teacher education.

“How do I prepare a teacher? What are skills a teacher needs to work with an at-risk student in an online environment? Those are huge variables,” she said.

Ms. Cavanaugh, of the University of Florida, said it appears that policymakers and others are warming to the idea that online programs should be an option for special populations of students.

For example, a [national survey](#) of more than 400 principals found that most expressed interest in using online education for credit-recovery courses in their schools, even while holding reservations about the quality of those courses. [Another report](#), released last December, which advocated changes to state policy to give all students more options to online learning, was produced by a collaboration headed by former Govs. Bob Wise of West Virginia and Jeb Bush of Florida, not education researchers.

Ms. Cavanaugh hopes that shift in thinking will allow for more nuanced and thorough study, and in turn attract more researchers to what is still a lightly populated field.

“The virtual-school research community is small and certainly needs collaboration,” she said. “My hope is people who have been studying mainstream education will begin to recognize the scope of virtual education and bring their expertise to this field.”

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A Teacher Finds Good in Testing

Education Week

By: Ama Nyamekye

August 29, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/31/02nyamekye_ep.h31.html?

[tkn=QMLF18F%2Fmta9k8OKGGWArbNg8tES7JYfh%2Fd2&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/31/02nyamekye_ep.h31.html?tkn=QMLF18F%2Fmta9k8OKGGWArbNg8tES7JYfh%2Fd2&cmp=clp-edweek)

In college, I pumped my fist at a rally against standardized testing. I'd never seen the exam I was protesting, but stood in solidarity with educators and labor organizers who felt the testing movement was an attack on teachers, particularly those working in poor public schools. My opposition grew when I became a teacher in the South Bronx, one of America's poorest communities. I wanted to uplift my students and resented the weight of a looming high-stakes test.

Besides, I thought good teachers should be left to their own devices. And, I was certain that I was a good teacher. For the most part, my students were punctual, respectful, and engaged. It wasn't until my second year in the classroom that I began questioning this assumption.

In a routine evaluation, my principal praised my organization, management, and facilitation, but posed the following question: "How do you know the kids are really getting it?" She urged me to develop more-rigorous assessments of student learning. Ego and uncertainty inspired me to measure the impact of my instruction. I thought I was effective, but I wanted proof.

In my third year of teaching, I put myself to the test. To formally link my instruction to quantifiable student outcomes, I decided my sophomores would take the state Comprehensive English Regents Examination a year early. As I deconstructed the test—which was a blend of reading-based questions and essays—I appreciated its ability to efficiently achieve what I could not.

Writing rigorous and comprehensive test questions is a meticulous and laborious science. The New York regents' exam was based on the science of assessment and aligned with state curriculum standards, core curriculum, and federal mandates. The state education department oversaw testing, ensuring questions were written and vetted to be "statistically and psychometrically sound," and published an online archive of exams, rubrics, and sample student essays. Rather than reinvent the wheel, I decided to learn from these tools. What I learned was surprising and empowering.

I discovered holes in my curriculum. I once dismissed standardized testing for its narrow focus on a discrete set of skills, but I learned that my self-made assignments were more problematic. It turned out they were skewed in my favor. I was better at teaching literary analysis than grammar and punctuation. When I started giving ongoing standardized assessments, I noticed that my students showed steady growth in literary analysis, but less growth in grammar and punctuation. I was teaching to my strengths instead of strengthening my weaknesses.

The test also compensated for the inherently subjective act of grading. I was designing the quizzes and projects used to evaluate my students and, by extension, my instruction. My intimate knowledge of students and the bonds we forged in the classroom influenced my perception of their performance. I knew Michael was a talented, but lazy, writer. I admired the dogged work ethic of Lian, a Chinese-born student, who struggled to master English. Naturally, I was emotionally invested in the success of my students—their grades were my grades.

The test provided me with fresh perspectives on my work. I was not allowed to assess my students' writing. Colleagues from my English department used detailed rubrics to grade each essay. These peers had emotional distance from the work and could scrutinize essays for evidence of achievement.

Most of the teachers I've worked with over the years don't share my newfound enthusiasm. The 2010 Scholastic-Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation [survey](#) of 40,000 educators nationwide found that only 27 percent felt state standardized tests were essential or very important in measuring student performance. I'm now convinced that these sentiments are the product of a testing movement that has become more about fear and politics than pedagogy. Teachers, I believe, are pumping their fists for the wrong reasons.

Fear is at the heart of this backlash. My colleagues fear the proliferation of drill-and-kill instruction. This outrage, though understandable, should be directed at the policies and school leaders that use standardized testing as a replacement—rather than a measurement—for inspired instruction. These drill-and-kill practices demoralize teachers and warp the aim of assessment.

The most powerful opposition comes from the teachers' unions. At a recent convention, the [National Education Association](#) insisted that it "will always be opposed to high-stakes, test-driven evaluations." This rhetoric is a distraction from the underlying problem. Standardized testing reflects the curricular priorities of a state's education agenda. Blaming the test for the shortcomings of that agenda is like blaming the barometer for the weather.

That's not to say there is no room for improvement. On the whole, testing must become more innovative, technologically advanced, and better at identifying skills essential for college and career readiness. But the same is true of our public school systems. We certainly wouldn't do away with America's noble, but deeply flawed, experiment with public education.

Sadly, the actual merits and shortcomings of standardized testing often get lost in this stalemated debate that positions the test as either a scourge on teachers or a panacea for reform. In truth, the test is nothing more than a tool. It will not singlehandedly turn around swaths of failing classrooms or be the death of public education.

Only policies, leaders, and, most importantly, teachers wield that kind of power over school performance. Like any assessment tool—including the ones teachers regularly generate and assign—standardized testing has strengths and limitations.

When I "depolticized" the test, I found a useful and flawed ally. The exam excelled where I struggled, offering comprehensive and

standards-based assessments. I thrived where the test fell short, designing creative, performance-based projects. Together, we were strategic partners. I designed and graded innovative projects—my students participated in court trials for Shakespearean characters—and the test provided a rubric that guided my evaluation of student learning.

All of my students who took the exam passed. Most earned high scores. I also found a correlation between improved test performance and growth in reading and writing ability. Grammar and punctuation were still my students' weakest areas, but there was evidence of growth.

The test didn't make my students smarter. It made the teacher smarter. I learned that my job wasn't simply to encourage students to relentlessly pursue knowledge. I needed to constantly test what I thought I knew about teaching.

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Maintaining High-Tech Comes at a High Price for Schools

Education Week

By: Jenny Kane

August 29, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2011/08/29/mct_nmhightechcost.html

Students owe the district about \$150,000 in laptop fines and fees from the last three years of the Farmington Municipal Schools' program for middle and high school students.

But the district may never see the money.

The laptop program, known as the [Farmington Learning Initiative](#), has only collected about \$10,000 in laptop repair fees since the program began three years ago. Designed as a means to give access to computers to the district's diverse student population, it grants all students from sixth to 12th grade a free laptop to be used at home and at school for educational purposes until they graduate.

The program costs about \$2 million annually, paid for by taxpayers. The first year cost about \$4 million because the district had to buy three times the usual number of laptops.

The district currently has about 5,300 laptops. After four years of use, the laptops will be inspected and returned for use in lower grades if possible, or recycled if broken.

Pricy Equipment

The district has not even reached the four-year mark for the initial round of computers, and already the students' laptops are puttering out—as they have been throughout the past three years. Between broken screens, hard drives, DVD drives, chargers and other components, the district is not satisfied with the number of issues had with the technology, or its expense. The students and the parents feel the same, especially with the new price hikes.

In August, the district announced that all students in the laptop program would pay \$35 a year for an insurance premium, instead of the previous initial payment of \$25. The premium, which is hoped to squelch the more lofty fines, will keep all fines at \$100 or below.

If a single repair costs less than \$100, a student pays the amount of the damages. If the cost is more than \$100, they pay a \$100 deductible. If the damage is clearly intentional, the student pays the full cost of repair or replacement.

Whether damage is intentional or not—and who is responsible for the damage—is at the discretion of each school principal, district officials said.

"It's been a learning curve for all of us," said Janet Hunter, principal of Heights Middle School.

Hunter is just one of the principals who has had to decide how to handle repair fees and who to charge them to, the parents or the district. On a case-to-case basis, she has had to be flexible with parents, sometimes charging the full repair cost, sometimes using payment plans and sometimes having to dismiss fines altogether.

"We want the laptops in the hands of the kids," said Hunter, who often takes away laptop privileges such as games and special sites as an alternative to taking away students' laptops until their fines are paid.

Last year, the fines ranged from about \$10 for a broken or lost adapter to about \$100 for a hard drive, or around \$900 for full repair or replacement.

Many parents received multiple repair bills throughout the year and were unable to afford them. And despite the new insurance program, there is no protection against the total cost of multiple repair fines.

"I'm still not able to pay," said Tawnya Kenworthy, whose son is a sophomore at Piedra Vista High School. "Until I pay, he

doesn't get (a laptop.)"

Kenworthy is not alone, as indicated by the \$150,000 owed to the district in laptop costs alone. Those costs make up nearly half of the entire \$350,000 owed to the district in damaged or lost goods. Textbooks, the second most costly item supplied to students, make up about \$110,000 of students' owed money.

"This isn't just a student issue. This is a parent issue. This is a district issue," said Charles Thacker, the district's chief technology officer.

"Everybody knows the economic realities," Emerson said, noting that no party really can afford spare change right now, including schools.

Granted, the majority of students have no repair needs, he said, but there is evidence of neglect for those students who do owe.

"Most of the damage is preventable," Thacker said.

About 1,000 laptops sustain damage each year, which means about 20 percent of students damage their computers annually.

The percentage is unusually high among similar programs in the state, where the damage rate is about 10 percent.

Glitches

But while it is easy to point the finger at students, the computers themselves are not without flaw.

On Thursday, when many sixth graders received their first brand-new school laptops at Heights Middle School, glitches were already popping up.

"These are new computers, and they already have problems. It's not the kids' fault," said Hunter, standing near a small row of returned laptops.

So it begs another question: Must students use the district laptops?

"If they don't have one, they're going to have a pretty tough time," Emerson said, explaining that the software is expensive to duplicate. The district purchased a medley of programs specially designed for students, which would come at a great price to a private individual.

District schools also do not allow any other computers or laptops besides their own at the school. So, even with the right software, students would be limited to using it only on their personal laptop at home.

The ban is to prevent students from bringing laptops with unregulated programs to school, Emerson said. The district, though it provides Internet, bars students from accessing social networking sites and other sites containing what is deemed inappropriate content.

"Where we're at today took us a long time to get to," said Thacker, explaining that the homogeneous technology model not only allows for more efficient oversight of programs but also a streamlined technical services department.

Before, when students, teachers and other staff came to the department with a hodgepodge of computer types, it made finding solutions difficult and time consuming, he said.

Despite the district's insistence that all students have the school laptops, there are still those who go without. Most of those students do so temporarily because they are waiting for fines to be paid or for their laptop to be repaired.

For the latter group, the ones whose computers are being fixed, the district has laptops to loan because the repairs can take weeks.

"We prefer to give them to a student that has a repair under warranty," Thacker said, explaining that first priority are students who have in the past treated their laptops with care and whose damage is not neglectful or intentional.

The number of these loaner computers is limited, with about 30 at each middle school and about 50 at each high school. Demand often exceeds supply.

Usage

Though there still are teachers who shy from technology, the district is doing its best to implement a more technology-based curriculum. Some teachers already are gung-ho and rely heavily on the laptops for their lessons.

"It requires them to use a higher level of thinking," said Jane Powers, a sixth-grade language arts teacher at Heights Middle

School. "If you're integrating things, there's a lot to it."

Many of the teachers at Heights Middle School embraced the initiative, district officials said, and it has been a great model for future use.

While 65 percent of students in the district said they only used their laptops between one and four hours in a week, the students at Heights Middle School use the laptops extensively from class to class. The greater usage has led to a realization: Students who are assigned more work in class on their laptop are less likely to damage their computers.

Heights Middle School has a damage rate of about 10 percent, as opposed to the district's 20 percent.

"It's the teachers that have to take the steps," Emerson said, explaining that students will not respect their laptops until their grades are reliant on their laptop work.

Future Outlook

In the seven years of research the district executed before implementing the laptop initiative, the district found that 40 percent of students had no access to a computer at home. Even now, with the laptop program, about 25 percent of students still have no computer at home.

Without that access, students will be at a disadvantage entering the job market, district officials said.

"We're focusing on the concept of 21st century skills. The 1950s classroom won't work anymore," Thacker said.

The district eventually would like all grades to have access to laptops, and in future years it may purchase iPads or MacBook Pros for the secondary schools. For now, they are working with what they have, Apple MacBooks.

"It's kind of cool, but it's still kind of tough," said Kenworthy, who is still working on getting together enough money so her son take part in the initiative.

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FLORIDA NEWS

Opinion: School Choice in Colorado

Orlando Sentinel

By: George Will

August 30, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/opinion/views/os-ed-george-will-082811-20110829-3.0.4811500.column>

The red stone outcropping that gives this community its name is just a facet of the histrionic geology of Douglas County that sprawls prettily along the front range of the Rockies south of Denver. The county is named, Lord knows why, for Stephen Douglas, who defeated Abraham Lincoln in Illinois' 1858 U.S. Senate election. Lincoln opposed Douglas' repugnant "popular sovereignty" plan for allowing territories to vote for or against accepting slavery. Today, Douglas County has an admirable plan for popular sovereignty in education -- school choice.

But the plan has been disrupted by a judge who says, among other things, that providing parents with scholarship money that can be spent at religious or secular schools violates Colorado's Constitution. That document says "no person shall be required to attend or support any ministry or place of worship, religious sect or denomination against his consent."

Such "compelled support" clauses in state constitutions were written to prevent establishment of official state religions.

But Douglas County's scholarship program is religiously neutral, enabling *families* to choose whatever school best suits their children.

Prudently, opponents of the program do not claim that it violates the U.S. Constitution's proscription of "establishment" of religion. In 2002, the Supreme Court, considering an Ohio program legally indistinguishable from Douglas County's, said the Constitution is not violated by a scholarship plan that is "neutral with respect to religion" and involves *parents* directing government aid to schools by their "own genuine and independent private choice." The Wisconsin Supreme Court, ruling on a similar school choice program in Milwaukee, cited the U.S. Supreme Court: "The crucial question is not whether some benefit accrues to a religious institution as a consequence of the legislative program, but whether its principal or primary effect advances religion."

The judge ruled against Douglas County at the behest of the American Civil Liberties Union, which is indiscriminately opposed to any public money reaching any religious institution in any way, and by others eager to protect public schools from competition. School choice usually is sought by poor parents victimized by failing schools in inner cities. Douglas County's embrace of

choice is notable because the median household income here is \$99,522 and only 1.9 percent of families are below the poverty line. The county opted for choice because a few years ago conservatives were elected to the school board, and conservatives are pro-choice about most things -- owning guns, driving SUVs, using incandescent light bulbs, etc. -- other than killing pre-born babies. Liberals are pro-choice mostly about the latter.

In 1925, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the constitutional right of parents "to direct the ... education of children under their control." This might seem to be a facet of the privacy right so dear to liberals (see above: abortion). Be that as it may, Douglas County's 500 scholarships empower parents to exercise the right the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed. And the right Colorado's Supreme Court affirmed two years later: In 1927, it upheld the "right of parents to have their children taught where, when, how, what and by whom they may judge best."

This is not an abstract legal question for Diana and Mark Oakley, whose son Nate, 13, has socialization problems associated with Asperger's syndrome. Desperately unhappy at a large public school, he is, thanks to his scholarship, flourishing at a small private school.

The Oakleys have taken a line of credit to cover the \$11,325 of tuition not covered by the \$4,575 scholarship and other aid they have received. Such scholarships cost the county less than the more than \$8,000 it spends per public school pupil, so the program frees up money for public schools.

Mark and Jeanette Anderson wanted their son Max, 8, to have the math instruction offered by a small private school where he described his initial visit as "the best seven hours of my life." This school, with just 31 students, is in peril because it hired two teachers in anticipation of the 12 scholarship students whose aid is now in jeopardy. Derrick and Florence Doyle want the religious dimension of the Catholic school they have chosen. These parents are represented by the Virginia-based Institute for Justice, which has helped make the case law that will, eventually, vindicate the county.

The judge did not enjoin the scholarship program until Aug. 12, when many scholarship recipients were already enrolled in their schools. Happily, many of these schools are trying to keep their scholarship students, pending the predictable decision by a higher court that the disrupting judge has ignored settled law.

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Florida: Joe Negron wants ed commish to be a cabinet member (again)

Orlando Sentinel

By: Staff

August 29, 2011

http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_politics/2011/08/joe-negron-wants-ed-commish-to-be-a-cabinet-member-again.html

Sen. **Joe Negron**, R-Stuart, has filed legislation that would make the education commissioner an elected official and a member of the Cabinet, essentially stripping future governors of any influence he or she may have over the commissioner.

The bill, [SB 96](#), asks voters to amend the state Constitution in the 2012 election and make the education commissioner an elected official. The job previously was an elected office, but a constitutional amendment passed by voters in 1998 made it an appointed position, along with the Secretary of State, and merged the treasurer's and comptroller's offices into the Office of the Chief Financial Officer.

In the case of the education commissioner, proponents of the change said that it would ensure that an educator ran the state Department of Education, not a politician. Former Gov. **Charlie Crist** was the last elected official to run the department.

If the amendment is approved by the Legislature and voters, a race for education commissioner would be held in 2014.

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STATE NEWS

Indiana: Goshen High gives laptops to freshmen

Indianapolis Star

By: Staff

August 30, 2011

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20110830/NEWS04/108300356/Goshen-High-gives-laptops-freshmen>

Goshen High School is going digital.

The Elkhart Truth reported that nearly 480 freshmen at Goshen High School have been given laptops to use for school work in and out of the building.

Assistant Principal Noah Tonk told parents and students that the future of employment in the United States will depend upon the

students who are ready for careers in a digital environment.

Goshen administrators say they plan to save money in the long run by eliminating textbooks. Rental fees are \$116. The total cost to the school corporation is \$317,765.

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Ohio: 7,000 teachers could face tests on their smarts

Columbus Dispatch

By: Jennifer Smith Richards

August 30, 2011

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2011/08/30/7000-teachers-could-face-tests-on-their-smarts.html>

If Ohio's new teacher-retesting program were in place now, nearly 900 teachers in 41 struggling Columbus schools would have to take tests to prove they know their subjects.

If they didn't pass, they could lose their jobs.

Statewide, more than 7,000 classroom teachers in 346 charter and traditional public schools would be affected by the provision if it applied this year. The reason: They are working in the bottom 10 percent of Ohio's public schools.

More than 1,200 teachers in 75 low-performing schools are in central Ohio. In addition to the 41 Columbus City Schools buildings, local schools among the lowest-performing this year include Kae Avenue Elementary in Whitehall, four juvenile correctional facility schools, the Ohio State School for the Blind and 28 charter schools.

It'll be another year before the retesting program kicks in. But data from this year's school report cards offer a preview of how many teachers could be affected.

The Ohio Department of Education will rank schools according to an index of state-test performance under the provision, which was part of the state's budget that became law last month.

Schools can decide whether to keep a teacher who fails a test, although the educator's results can't be the sole consideration.

The state still is deciding how the new law will work and will develop rules over the next year, said Patrick Gallaway, spokesman for the state Education Department.

For example, the department hasn't said whether schools for special-education students, dropouts or incarcerated youth would be exempt. Those students tend to score worse on state tests.

Gallaway said the department also hasn't decided who will foot the bill.

The law says teachers can't be made to pay, but it doesn't say who will. Ohio uses the Praxis series of exams to test teachers' knowledge of the subjects they teach. The cost per test ranges from \$50 to more than \$100, depending on the subject.

"It's your tax dollars at work," said Rhonda Johnson, president of the Columbus Education Association.

Teachers groups have been critical of the retesting idea since Gov. John Kasich pitched it. Johnson said the tests won't measure teacher effectiveness, and they won't help anyone improve. The real beneficiary of the retesting law will be the testing company, she said.

"Keep weighing the pig. Let's not feed him anymore. Let's not do anything but weigh the pig and see if anything changes," Johnson said.

Robert Sommers, Kasich's education adviser, has said that retesting is necessary to ensure educators who work in struggling schools are competent in the subjects they teach.

Mark Hill, president of the Worthington Education Association, said the retesting program "creates a disincentive for teachers to go and take the toughest jobs. We're punishing them. Why would they ever take that chance?"

Only teachers of core subjects would be subject to the retesting. The state considers these core subjects: reading and English, math, science, foreign language, government, economics, fine arts, history and geography. Although art and foreign-language teachers would be held accountable for student performance in low-achieving schools, there are no state tests for students in those subjects.

The law says that a teacher who passes his or her retesting exam won't have to take it again for three years, even if the school continues to struggle.

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New Jersey: Newark 'Teachers Village' progresses as state clears way for financial incentive package

New Jersey Star Ledger

By: Salvador Rizzo

August 26, 2011

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/08/newark_teachers_village_progre.html

After years of planning, the Teachers Village in Newark — a major urban renewal project housing charter schools, apartments for educators and a new retail corridor — is coming together.

The state's Economic Development Authority gave final approval Thursday to a package of financial incentives for the village, freeing up the money for construction to begin soon. Developers are counting on a broad array of public financing tools, including tax breaks and grants, and city officials say all of those pieces are now in place.

"The orchestration is done," said Stefan Pryor, Newark's deputy mayor for economic development. "It's safe to say all of these commitments have been made and these monies are ready to be deployed."

Now the lead developer, Ron Beit, says he expects to tie up all of the loose ends on the financing side of the deal next month, with a groundbreaking "shortly thereafter."

Once completed by sometime in 2014, the \$142 million complex will transform part of the Central Ward into a mini-city with three charter schools, apartments to house teachers, a day care center, businesses and restaurants.

Officials hope it will touch off a wave of revitalization, drawing more people to the streets and even more businesses to the surrounding areas.

"It will help stitch together the downtown and University Heights district," Pryor said. "The project will also create 224 units of housing for teachers at a moment in which Newark is pursuing significant school reform efforts."

He said the goal was for the housing units, priced for middle-income residents, to help the schools recruit and retain teachers, saying that it is the key to education reform.

Most of the financing will come from private investors that Beit has lined up over the last five years. But the city, state and federal governments are also providing their share in grants and more than \$30 million in loans at low interest rates while providing several types of tax credits.

Advocates of the project said Gov. Chris Christie, for whom charter schools and education reform are top priorities, has been particularly supportive of the Teachers Village.

Christie "was in early and understood the transformative nature of this plan for this neighborhood, and was a supporter immediately," Beit said.

Pryor added that the governor guided legislation and pushed state agencies to get the plans out the door, calling his help "instrumental."

"The combination of features is something close to unique if not unique," Pryor said of the Teachers Village. "Teacher housing as a subset of workforce housing is a rare but very compelling idea."

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