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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/18/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/18/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### Could the Internet spell the end of snow days?

Associated Press

By: Staff

May 18, 2011

[http://abclocal.go.com/wtvg/story?section=news/national\\_world&id=8137557](http://abclocal.go.com/wtvg/story?section=news/national_world&id=8137557)

PARKVILLE, Mo. - Could the Internet mean the end of snow days? Some schools think so, and they are experimenting with ways for students to do lessons online during bad weather, potentially allowing classes to go on during even the worst blizzard.

"Virtual snow days" would help ease pressure on school calendars. Because districts are required to be in session for a certain number of hours or days, losing teaching time to winter weather can mean extending the school day or cutting short spring break or summer vacation.

And canceling school in the winter, when some of the most difficult material of the year is covered, risks leaving students with a learning deficit heading into the spring, when many states administer standardized tests.

"Even if you can't continue on at the same pace, being able to keep students on track can make a huge difference," said Doug Levin, executive director of the nonprofit State Educational Technology Directors Association.

Virtual learning, which has been widely used by colleges and universities for years, is becoming more viable for younger students as teachers and administrators grow comfortable with the technology. Online learning also saves money because districts don't have to pay for transportation, electricity and custodians.

But there are obstacles, too. Many families don't have Internet access with speeds that would support complex classroom-style work, especially in rural areas and impoverished inner cities. Families with multiple children - without multiple computers - could be hard-pressed to keep up.

And some people say kids just need an occasional extra day off in the depths of winter.

"When deep snow falls, the world becomes quiet and still. And if we listen to our instincts, we settle in and enjoy the pure joy of not doing," David Santner wrote on the website for the Poughkeepsie Day School in New York, where his son is a middle schooler, after the school turned to online learning during a spate of winter storms.

For schoolchildren, old-fashioned snow days used to mean languorous hours spent playing outside in the drifts, watching television or sipping hot chocolate. But someday, kids who can't get to the classroom might just sit down with their computers.

Josie Holford, head of the Poughkeepsie school, which had six snow days and four late starts this past winter, said it's possible

to enjoy the outdoors and keep learning. Students in one class were told to draw a picture in the snow for a lesson on angles and to take a picture of their creation.

"We have to recognize as teachers, educators, all of us, that we are in a completely different landscape, and that learning really isn't confined to a textbook or a teacher anymore," Holford said. "We all have to be learning all the time. Why should a snow day stop the progress of learning?"

At St. Therese School in the Kansas City suburb of Parkville, students recently did a virtual make-up day after classes were canceled six times because of weather.

As she used a computer drawing program to complete an art lesson in her kitchen, seventh-grader Cameron Mottet predicted her classmates would embrace the system, especially if it means "they don't have to go to school in June."

Cameron's older sister, whose school isn't making up days virtually, has grumbled that she will be in class while Cameron is free to hang out at the pool.

The first experiments with virtual snow days began a few years ago as individual teachers started logging on during poor weather to drill older students. Since then, entire schools and districts have joined in, using websites such as Skype and YouTube to keep students as young as kindergarten studying during storms.

An increasing number of teachers have their own websites, so sometimes starting virtual lessons is as simple as telling parents to check on snow days to see if any assignments are posted. Other times, the makeup work occurs afterward, with students completing assignments from home on days set aside for teacher training. Students can chat online with their teachers and ask questions via email.

In one school, younger students were directed to a website to play online money games, while older students in another school completed a simulation program to test how the angle of a baseball pitch affects the distance a ball is thrown.

The experiments appear to be the most prevalent in affluent private schools like Cameron's, where only three of 643 students lacked a home computer.

At an all-girls boarding school in Simsbury, Conn., some teachers started using the Internet for lessons when roads become impassable so students who commute didn't fall behind the others who live on campus.

"It's been a really bad winter, so the teachers were grateful they could use these tools and not lose a day or cram too much material in one day," said Vivian K. Elba, director of marketing and communications at Ethel Walker School.

But the efforts aren't limited to wealthy, private schools. The Mississinawa Valley district on the Indiana-Ohio state line has led Ohio's push for virtual snow days. Fifty-two percent of the district's 700 students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Since Mississinawa got permission last fall to make up two snow days electronically, four other Ohio districts joined the pilot program. Superintendent Lisa Wendel has received calls from other states interested in virtual make-up days.

"It is going to continue to snowball in this country," said Wendel, whose district has been forced to call off classes 11 times this school year.

However, Wendel questions whether virtual snow days will continue in her own district. Ohio lawmakers have thrown out a provision allowing the practice, citing concerns that poor students without home computers and rural students without Internet access could be at a disadvantage. Lawmakers continue to debate the issue.

Jalisa Rush, a seventh-grader in the district who has her own laptop, said she and her friends spent their e-days chatting on Facebook as they did online assignments that included calculating the calories and transfats in favorite foods. Because some of the projects were more creative, she didn't mind committing five to six hours to them.

"I thought it was really exciting and something new to try, which was really pretty great," she said. But she added: "It gets a little harder because you didn't really have the teacher there to explain something if you have a question."

Carol Hussin, principal of Cameron's St. Therese School, said some parents have complained the online work took longer than the six hours teachers intended, but others said they enjoyed getting a glimpse of their children's studies.

"I think it's a great tool to have," said Cameron's mother, Jane. "Obviously it's not going to replace going to school. But for situations like this, I think it's wonderful."

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## Specialists Weigh Common Social Studies Standards

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

May 18, 2011

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."

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 we do 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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## **Report Points to Widening Gap In Boys' Educational Attainment**

Education Week

By: Sarah D. Sparks

May 17, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2011/05/report\\_boys\\_college\\_readiness.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2011/05/report_boys_college_readiness.html)

As the needs of global labor change and college readiness standards increase, American boys have been slower to adapt than girls, according to a report set to be released this morning.

Thomas Mortenson, a senior scholar at the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, in Washington, has been arguing since the mid-1990s that American men are treading water economically as women gain ground. His latest report, [Economic Change Effects on Men](#), presented at the Washington-based Boys Initiative meeting this morning, expands his workforce and higher education data to K-12 education.

Mortenson argues that teaching styles and discipline policies cause boys to disengage sooner than girls and drop out at higher rates. Among his findings:

- In 2010, 72.8 percent of children lived with a father, down from 88.8 percent in 1960, when these data were first reported.
- In 2010, 62.8 percent of young men who graduated from high school enrolled in college, up 7.6 percentage points from 1970, but far below the continuation rate for young women—74 percent in 2010, up 25.5 percentage points from 1970. “Each spring, the Bureau of Labor Statistics puts out its spring study on recent high school graduates, and I’ve been compiling that data since 1959,” Mortenson told me. “The gap between males and females is now greater than 10 percentage points, and it’s never been that wide before” favoring girls during his years of analysis.
- Boys ages 6 to 14 are more than twice as likely as girls to have a developmental disability and [three times as likely](#) to be diagnosed with mental retardation.

Mortenson told me he thinks school format is partly to blame, with greater focus on writing and test preparation and fewer opportunities for active projects. As he puts it: “Boys have to be doing something: Things have to be blowing up or being built or going really fast. If you ask them to sit down and write and read, more physically passive activities will turn off boys before they turn off girls.”

That requires a bit of a gut-check, I think, because active, engaging instruction (including the occasional explosion where

appropriate) has been shown to be better for students of either gender, not just boys. For a few examples, take a look at my [blog](#) yesterday, or other perspectives [here](#).

Yet I find it interesting that Mortenson also argues that educators and parents have not encouraged boys as much as girls to branch out from traditional gender stereotypes in careers. He recalled the experience of his own daughter, who favored reading and writing in elementary school, but who had a high school math teacher who refused to accept that she "wasn't good at math." She is now studying advanced statistics and quantitative analysis in college.

"My perception over the last 40 years is we've provided a lot of support and encouragement for girls to try and take on new things," he said, "but I've also seen no special effort to encourage boys to take on different subjects."

"A growing percentage of boys are not getting the education they need for the industries that are growing, like health and service sectors," he added. "I've tried to say to boys, 'If you want a good job, think about becoming a nurse' ... but nobody ever introduces boys to entering these traditionally female occupations, and someone needs to do that."

What do you think, readers? I know there are big pushes from high-profile organizations like the American Association for the Advancement of Science to encourage girls to enter math and science fields, but I admit I can't bring to mind many programs specifically trying to get boys interested in careers where there are a dearth of men, like elementary education. Can anyone offer some suggestions?

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **Search narrows for Fla. education commissioner**

Associated Press

By: Christine Armario

May 17, 2011

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/state/search-narrows-for-fla-education-commissioner-1479818.html>

The search for Florida's next education commissioner has narrowed to about a half dozen potential candidates, though it remains to be seen whether recruiters will be able to lure them from top jobs to tackle one of the country's largest school systems.

At a Board of Education meeting Tuesday, recruiters said they had identified and spoken with about six candidates who they believe could significantly advance education in Florida. They did not provide names, but said the candidates include current superintendents, corporate leaders, and government appointments in their respective states.

Encouraging the candidates to apply is complicated by a number of challenges, including the Florida sunshine laws, under which all applications are public. William Adams, regional search associate for the headhunting firm Ray and Associates, said some candidates may wait to the last minute to expose themselves, or are convinced they'd be a good fit.

The firm has not received many applications, but Adams stressed that they are more concerned about the quality of the candidates than quantity.

"We are going to continue to push those people to apply," Adams said.

Whoever steps into the role will have big shoes to fill: Outgoing Commissioner Eric Smith has become a national leader in education reform and under his tenure, the state jumped ahead in education rankings and was named a winner of the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top competition. The state is currently pursuing a number of reforms, including changing how teachers are evaluated, increasing standards and turning around failing schools.

"Florida is not broken like a lot of states in terms of education," Adams told the board. "That makes our job even more difficult."

Smith will be leaving in June. He has said he wants to allow Gov. Rick Scott the opportunity to select a leader who will pursue his education agenda.

Also at the meeting on Tuesday, Frances Haithcock, chancellor of public schools, provided the board with an update on the state's Race to the Top implementation. The state was awarded \$700 million to pursue reforms that will double the number of incoming high school freshmen who graduate and go on to college, and cut the achievement gap in half by 2015.

Haithcock said they are concentrating on four areas: data systems; rigorous standards and assessments; working with struggling schools and teacher quality. Sixty-four of the state's 65 districts have Race to the Top programs that have been approved.

The next important deadline will be June 1, when districts must submit plans on the teacher evaluation system they will develop. Fifty percent must be based on student growth, but she said the other 50 percent has "lots of flexibility."

Smith and Haithcock noted that Race to the Top has basically been a means to fund reforms that they had planned to implement long beforehand.

"We got funding through Race to the Top, but never did anything radically different than what we were going to do," Smith said. "This is Florida's plan."

Smith highlighted several pieces of legislation that have recently been passed, including a teacher evaluation bill that will do away with tenure for new teachers and create an evaluation system that will be based largely on how much students improve on standardized tests.

"This is a game changer," Smith said.

Noting it was Smith's last board meeting as commissioner, the board presented him with a resolution acknowledging his achievements as commissioner. Thanking the board, Smith recalled a brief letter he'd received prior to starting the job from former chairman T. Willard Fair, stating that he was there to "serve the 2.7 million children of the state of Florida."

"I've done that happily and hopefully productively," he said.

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## Earning good school grades to get tougher

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

May 17, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-school-grades-florida-20110517.0.7341324.story>

### *State Board of Education bumps up A-to-F grading scale*

Getting good grades could soon be tougher for Florida's public schools.

The State Board of Education today approved a plan to slowly bump up A-to-F grading standards, so schools will need to do better to earn top marks.

The goal is to eventually have the school grading scale match the one that schools use to grade students — at least 90 percent needed for an A grade, at least 80 percent for a B and so on.

That is a huge change, as schools now earn A's for getting 66 percent on the grade calculations.

It is also a change many school superintendents do not like, said Education Commissioner Eric Smith.

But one of the hallmarks of Florida's school grading system — ushered in under former Gov. Jeb Bush — has been asking schools to do better and, once they do, pushing them to show even more improvement.

Standards have been pushed up four times since 2001. "History has demonstrated that with higher accountability, schools rise to the occasion and continue to improve," read a slide presented at the meeting.

School grades for elementary and middle schools are based on student scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. High school grades are based on FCAT, plus other factors such as graduation rates, student enrollment and success in advanced classes.

The new plan would kick in once 75 percent of either Florida's elementary, middle or high schools earned A's or B's.

Last year, 74 percent of elementary schools, 78 percent of middle schools and 71 percent of high schools earned those grades.

The first review would take place after the 2012 grades are released this summer and any changes would take place in the 2012-13 school year.

The grading standards would be pushed up slowly, with the first increase bumping up the required score needed for an A by four points, to 70 percent.

The board, as expected, also voted to demand higher FCAT writing test scores. That change, requiring a 4 on the six-point test instead of a 3.5, was expected.

In fact, when the state recently announced results from the 2011 writing exam, it noted how schools and districts had done meeting the new, higher standard. Many did well.

"They did make extra efforts to reach the higher bar," said Deputy Commissioner Kris Ellington.

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## State OKs Duval's management plan for struggling schools

Florida Times-Union

By: Topher Sanders

May 17, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/news/florida/2011-05-17/story/state-oks-duvals-management-plan-struggling-schools#ixzz1MhpgZUhl>

*Management responsibility given to Duval Partners nonprofit.*

The state Board of Education has approved Duval County Public Schools' plan to pass managerial responsibility of its four most struggling schools to a district-created nonprofit group if the schools don't improve on state exams.

Tuesday's news came a day after the nonprofit, Duval Partners for Excellent Education, elected its officers and a week after the group lost one of its most respected members.

Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals said he was encouraged the state board unanimously approved Duval's plan.

"I feel great," Pratt-Dannals said. "I anticipated with [Education Commissioner Eric Smith's] recommendation that it would be a positive vote. Now it's about moving forward and improving the schools."

The Duval Partners group meets again Monday to discuss its future and to make plans in case it has to manage one or more of the intervene schools: Andrew Jackson, Raines and Ribault high schools and North Shore K-8.

"We're trying to posture ourselves so that when the tests scores come in we'll be ready to move," said John Baker, who was elected as chairman of the group.

Students and school-level Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores are expected in the first week of June.

Baker said he only intended to serve as chairman for a few months until the group finds someone else. Marcella Washington was elected as the group's vice chair, Roslyn Phillips was elected treasurer and the Rev. Marvin Zanders was elected secretary.

Duval Partners will meet every Monday, Baker said, and those meetings will be open to the public after a memorandum of understanding is signed between the group and the school district.

The group has had four meetings so far, all closed to the public.

Developing the memorandum of understanding is the next step for Duval Partners and the school system. The School Board will discuss the memorandum today during its workshop. The memorandum will only outline Duval Partners' role as an advisory group. If the group has to manage one or more of the intervene schools, the district and Duval Partners will develop a contract detailing the nonprofit's responsibilities.

Board members Betty Burney and Paula Wright, who represent the districts containing the four intervene schools, continued to voice their objection to handing Duval Partners the managerial role with the schools.

"It is preposterous that we sit as a board and we're talking about a group of individuals to take control of four of our critically performing schools and don't know what they're supposed to do," Burney said. "That says a lot."

Burney and board Chairman W.C. Gentry disagreed on the amount of control the board will have over the schools should they be handed over to Duval Partners.

Burney said last week the board will have no control over the schools when they are in Duval Partners' hands; Gentry says the board can have as much control as it writes into the contract.

"Through the contract, we will control what happens in those schools," he said.

It's unclear whether that contract has to be approved by the state.

Gentry said his hope is that the members of Duval Partners look to the School Board for advice and direction.

### *Still some tension*

Wright, who is serving as liaison between Duval Partners and the board after Burney declined the role, said last week that she was unclear and uncomfortable with how certain programming and staffing decisions will be made with the group.

Wright said neither she nor the members of Duval Partners knew where the School Board's responsibilities ended and Duval Partners began.

Duval Partners is in talks with Massachusetts-based Mass Insight Education to see if that organization can guide the group through the process of hiring an executive director and finding a management organization to be a long-term partner.

Alvin White, who worked as a teacher, principal and administrator in Duval County Public Schools for 35 years, resigned from the group last week stating he wanted to make room for more diversity in the group by adding white women and men.

White's resignation leaves Duval Partners with 11 members, which includes three white men and no white women.

White acknowledged that diversity could have been added to the group without his resignation.

"Maybe they could have," he said. "But it was my decision to go this way and I'm just going to stand on that. I wish them well."

When asked if Burney and Wright's objections to Duval Partners having managerial responsibility over the schools played a role in his decision, White said that "wasn't in my letter."

Baker said White is a big loss for the group, but he was confident the group will find other good people to join the nonprofit. The group has approached two people to become members of Duval Partners, but Baker wouldn't name the individuals.

It is also unclear how much money the district will pass through to Duval Partners in order for the group to run the schools. Pratt-Dannals said the district was still putting together cost information.

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Cincinnati Public Schools links teacher pay with student achievement**

Cincinnati Inquirer

By: Jessica Brown

May 18, 2011

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20110518/NEWS0102/305180038/CPS-links-teacher-pay-achievement>

Cincinnati Public Schools will be the first district in the state and among a handful nationally to link the pay and advancement of its 2,400 teachers to student achievement, district officials announced today.

The new system – called for by the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers contract agreement reached in December 2010 – is designed to enhance accountability, provide teachers with more feedback and growth opportunities, and focus on strengthening skills that improve student learning.

At a news conference, district leaders lauded the collaborative process that brought them to this point.

"While legislators are discussing mandating this, it is significant that we reached this milestone voluntarily and in partnership with our teachers," said Mary Ronan, superintendent of the 33,000-student district.

"It keeps Cincinnati a leader, not a follower," added Board President Eve Bolton.

District leaders stressed that this is not a "pay for performance" or "merit pay" system. The district tried about 10 years ago to create a pay for performance system but the idea was met with outcry and eventually died.

Statewide employees are balking at Gov. John Kasich's efforts to incorporate merit pay into education reforms.

"This is totally different," said union president Julie Sellers "This is not merit pay, this is not pay for performance. It is not based on a single test score."

Instead, this system offers multiple measures of a teacher's performance. It gives teachers credit for things they were already doing in the classroom — things like gauging a student's ability to read a story and then discuss it with the class; art students' portfolios; music students' ability to read sheet music.

Those are all things that aren't measured on standardized tests, but indicate how effective a teacher is, Sellers said. The teachers select the goals along with the principal. Positive evaluations would be required to receive pay increments at most of the levels of a typical teacher's career.

"This includes every teacher at every school from social workers to art teachers," said Sellers. "If you base it just on a test score from the state it would only be 27 to 30 percent of the teachers in the district."

District officials also noted the system won't be a new cost for the district.

School board approval is not required for the system to go into place, however, feedback from board members, the community, and parents may be incorporated into the system during the pilot year.

District leaders said the new system represents a "culture shift" in evaluating its classroom teachers because it puts teachers in the driver's seat.

Under the new system teachers and principals mutually agree on personal goals for the teacher that will advance student growth and the mission of the school. The previous system was much more "top down," leaders said.

"It will give teachers a sense of empowerment to the teachers," said Sellers.

The administration is proposing the evaluation system as a one-year pilot program starting next school year.

Committees have been working for two years to research teacher evaluation system across the country. They pulled pieces from various systems for the Cincinnati version.

Ohio's collective bargaining legislation and Kasich's education reform plans put emphasis on tying teacher pay to student achievement. The federal Race to the Top program, which awarded millions to reform-minded school districts, also includes emphasis on student growth. Cincinnati is ahead of the curve among other Ohio districts in crafting its system to fit those goals.

Changing the teacher evaluation system in Cincinnati was one of the more difficult hurdles for teachers and district administration to agree on, and one of the causes of numerous delays in the negotiation process last year. Linking teacher pay to student growth was among the key reforms that the community pressured the parties to incorporate into the contract.

Nationally and statewide, the question of how to best measure a teacher's effectiveness has proven to be difficult. In Ohio, students only take state-required tests at certain grade levels and in certain subjects, which some argued doesn't provide an accurate measure of how good a job a teacher does.

In the end, the Cincinnati union contract left it up to committees of district employees, teachers and consultants to hash out final details of an evaluation system.

All the details of how the evaluations system will work at each school are not yet available. The community has not yet weighed in on the plan nor has the board or teachers union taken an official vote. School board members have reviewed a draft of the plan and will get more details Wednesday.

Community input sessions have not been scheduled yet.

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## **Our View: Education's grownups are at it again**

Idaho Statesman

By: Editorial Board

May 18, 2011

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/2011/05/18/1652856/educationsgrownups-are-at-it-again.html>

Of course, and for the record, Tom Luna is right. Politicking has no place in public education — especially when K-12's scarce taxpayer resources are stretched as never before.

But the state's schools superintendent has overplayed his hand and picked a counterproductive public fight with Idaho teachers. In a widely distributed and heavy-handed email, Luna implies that the schools have become campaign headquarters in the drive to overturn his controversial "Students Come First" legislation.

His email to the state's district superintendents, charter school administrators and school board members was light on specifics. Luna said he has received numerous reports of improper political activities in recent weeks — activities that would violate the teachers' code of ethics, "if substantiated."

That's a mighty big "if."

Luna described the potential consequences in no uncertain terms. Violating the code of the ethics could result in a letter of reprimand, the placement of "conditions" on a teacher's certificate, or the suspension or revocation of a certificate. Teachers with a suspended or revoked certificate can no longer teach in an Idaho public school.

For good measure, Luna reminded educators that failing to report an ethical violation is subject to the same list of sanctions.

Needless to say, Luna's less-than-subtle approach was poorly received by his political adversaries. Said Sherri Wood, president of the Idaho Education Association: "This is a blatant attempt to intimidate educators and the majority of the public who oppose the new education laws and want to vote on them."

On Monday, spokeswoman Melissa McGrath said Luna supports the teachers' right to be politically active — as long as they adhere to the code of ethics. But the damage had been done. The relationship between Luna and the state's rank-and-file teachers, already acrimonious, took one more turn toward the toxic.

As the state's elected schools official, Luna has an obligation to look into public inquiries, or act on complaints of impropriety. The problem isn't that he got involved. Nor is there a problem with reminding everyone to play by the rules. But by dropping the hammer, with an accusatory email circulated statewide, Luna has created a full-on controversy for himself.

Unfortunately, this comes as no surprise. This is the elected official who gave no inkling of his plans to overhaul public education during a 2010 statewide campaign — only to launch into the 2011 legislative session by springing the details on an

unsuspecting populace and an unprepared education community.

And so, after the session and amidst the backlash over "Students Come First," this latest dustup effectively summarizes the state of things. Luna is endeavoring to lead a professional group that, generally, disagrees with his agenda and, generally, dislikes and distrusts him personally. This unenviable position is partly of Luna's making.

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## Minnesota House approves K-12 budget; veto likely

Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune

By: Eric Roper

May 18, 2011

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/statelocal/122107769.html>

*Governor is expected to veto measure over policy differences.*

House Republicans set the stage early Wednesday for what will likely be a heated fight with the governor over education funding and policy when they approved a \$14 billion K-12 budget that faces a probable veto.

The GOP majority in the House passed the policy-heavy K-12 budget bill early Wednesday morning, allocating about 40 percent of the state's general fund spending. Similar bills passed the House and Senate in March, but lawmakers spent weeks resolving them before taking up a final version Tuesday night and debating it into the early hours of Wednesday.

The House approved the measure on a 70-55 vote.

"I think it can best be described as a bold and beautiful bill for the state of Minnesota," the measure's sponsor, Rep. Pat Garofalo, R-Farmington, said Tuesday.

The Senate is slated to take final action Wednesday and send it to Gov. Mark Dayton's desk. But after administration officials met with lawmakers Tuesday, all signs pointed to a veto.

"The way that it is, I don't see how we can support this bill," said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius. One of the top concerns, Cassellius said, is what it views as "disproportionate cuts" to schools in the Twin Cities.

The budget bill increases the state's per-pupil funding levels by about \$20 a year over the next two years. At the same time, it eliminates millions in funding to encourage integration in the Twin Cities and Duluth. Those funds will instead benefit schools across the state with high or improved reading scores as part of a new literacy program.

Minneapolis, for example, is expected to receive \$174 less per pupil than projected costs for the fiscal year beginning July 2012.

Dayton has said he does not want budget bills to contain policy provisions, which make up a substantial portion of the K-12 legislation. The bill would bar teachers from striking, eliminate teacher tenure and set up a teacher evaluation system based heavily on student testing. The state would also begin offering vouchers to poor families at low-performing public schools so they could attend private school.

Garofalo says the GOP has made major concessions to win over Dayton. Republicans nixed a freeze on special education funding in favor of slowing growth, restored some funding to the Twin Cities and Duluth, and decided not to turn the Perpich Center, a state agency, into a charter school.

"I guess I'm hopeful that we'll see some movement towards us here at some point," Garofalo said.

But Cassellius countered that the bill still undercuts the Twin Cities and Duluth and does not adequately fund special education.

"It wasn't enough of a move," Cassellius said. "And, really, they're still doing harm."

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