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NATIONAL NEWS

Low-income students and KIPP charter schools

The Washington Post

By: Richard D. Kahlenberg

June 7, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/low-income-students-and-kipp-charter-schools/2011/06/06/AGquWhKH_blog.html

This was written by Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation, a nonprofit public policy research organization, writes about education, equal opportunity and civil rights. This appeared on the foundation's blog.

Over at Think Progress, Matthew Yglesias raises an interesting issue about charter school skeptics. On the one hand, he says, successful charter schools, such as those that are part of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), are accused of skimming the most motivated students. On the other hand, KIPP is also accused of segregating students by race and class with an authoritarian No Excuses approach that is unappealing to most middle-class families.

KIPP is damned if it does take more advantaged students and damned if it doesn't, Yglesias says. He writes: "if KIPP's not condemned for skimming the easiest cases, it's condemned for promoting segregation by declining to make itself appealing to the easiest cases."

But for me, the problem with KIPP is precisely that it does both simultaneously – skims motivated students and yet is pointed to as a segregation success story. Some observers see high rates of achievement in KIPP schools, which are overwhelmingly poor, and conclude that poverty and economic segregation don't matter that much after all. At their most hyperbolic, charter enthusiasts like Davis Guggenheim, director of "Waiting for Superman," point to KIPP and conclude "we've cracked the code" in educating low-income students. Yglesias is only somewhat more measured when he writes that the success of charter networks like KIPP "demonstrates that it's possible to overcome challenging demographics."

But KIPP schools in no way demonstrate that the devastating effects of poverty and segregation have been "overcome." KIPP's predominantly low-income students do very well compared with other low-income students, which is a wonderful thing, but the effects of poverty remain, as two-thirds of the KIPP students who graduated eighth grade 10 or more years ago haven't earned a bachelor's degree. That's not what happens to more affluent students.

And KIPP hardly demonstrates that with the right teaching approach, economic segregation matters little in public education, because, just below the surface, KIPP schools are demographically nothing like regular high poverty public schools. By definition, KIPP students are from self-selected families who chose to enter a lottery; and KIPP has high attrition rates. Yglesias points out that some research finds that KIPP lottery losers also are highly mobile, which is true, but the difference is that unlike a regular public school, KIPP takes in very few new students in the 7th and 8th grades of middle school.

Think about the difference in the KIPP environment compared with a typical high poverty school. In KIPP, students are surrounded by other self-selected students, and, over time, enjoy a cohort including only those peers who have survived what all acknowledge to be a very rigorous and demanding program. In terms of peer values and norms, KIPP schools more closely resemble economically mixed schools than traditional high poverty schools.

It remains telling that on the one occasion when KIPP took over a regular high poverty public school – without a self-selected student population and with new students entering the classroom when they moved into the area – KIPP failed and got out of the business of running regular neighborhood public schools.

The lesson that many draw from KIPP – that a No Excuses approach can work in regular high poverty public schools – is completely unsupported. Moreover, KIPP demonstrably fails the American “common school” test of providing an economically and racially diverse environment, which is important for reasons having nothing to do with test scores. Most American public schools fail this test too, of course, but it’s important to note some schools, including some charter schools, pass it.

Rather than holding KIPP’s segregated high poverty environment out as the ideal, why aren’t more people talking about socioeconomically and racially integrated charter schools — like the Denver School of Science and Technology and the High Tech High schools in San Diego --as exemplars? These schools produce positive results for low-income students and also fulfill the common school ideal. And, unlike KIPP, they don’t lead people to draw false and profoundly conservative conclusions that poverty and segregation don’t need to be addressed.

Charter schools that provide teacher voice – as originally envisioned by American Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker – would also help satisfy charter school critics. At least this one.

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Opinion: To Fix the Schools, Let the Ideas Bloom

The New York Times

By: Hugh Osborn

June 2, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/07/opinion/l07ravitch.html?ref=opinion>

To the Editor:

In “Waiting for a School Miracle” (Op-Ed, June 1), Diane Ravitch rightly points out that the quick-fix “miracles” that seem to dramatically improve learning for the most disadvantaged students are usually mirages, not miracles. These charter and traditional public schools tend to feature an outdated reductionist model that simply doesn’t work.

But I am optimistic about our schools’ true potential. Duke University recently announced findings from a study that showed that regular public school teachers can be retrained to view and teach all students as gifted. In this “slow fix,” teachers learn to design rigorous but creative curriculum, not merely present textbook fare — a dramatic change. This nearly erases the achievement gap by the third grade regardless of family circumstances.

The Duke method has scaled to dozens of schools and, as in the work of Lorraine Monroe in Harlem and others, shows that school can trump poverty.

Can we please stop the arguing and excuses and start educating our neediest students?

The writer is an educational consultant who was an observer of the Duke project.

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FLORIDA NEWS

FCAT results are flat as state transitions to new test

Florida Current

By: Florida Tribune Staff

June 7, 2011

<http://www.thefloridacurrent.com/article.cfm?id=23270298>

Scores in Florida’s high-stakes test for public school students stayed relatively flat this year as the state begins to transition to a tougher new exam.

The Department of Education on Monday released scores from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test for reading, math and science for most grade levels, including scores from a new revamped version of the FCAT that officials have dubbed FCAT 2.0.

Because education officials have not yet developed new scores for the second version of the FCAT they essentially took this year's scores and curved them to match the overall statewide percentage from last year. The score levels for districts and schools, however, do vary.

The state released reading, math and science test scores ranging from fourth to 11th grade. FCAT 3rd grade scores were previously released back in May.

Science scores were based on the old version of the FCAT and showed that students continue to struggle in that area.

Both fifth graders and 11th graders scoring a three or higher, which is a proficient or grade level score in that subject, increased by two percent on the science exam. 51 percent of fifth graders scored a three or higher, while 40 percent of 11th graders scored a three or higher.

Among eighth graders scoring a three or higher on the science portion of the FCAT, numbers increased by three percent to 46 percent of students.

"I'm very encouraged by the continued progress we are seeing in science, but the overall performance of our students is still far too low," said Florida Department of Education Commissioner Eric Smith.

FCAT math scores, however, of a three or better among 10th graders decreased by two percent to 71 percent.

Students in grades 4-10 took the new FCAT 2.0 for reading and grades 4-8 also took the FCAT 2.0 for math.

"Important changes have recently been made to accelerate this progress, including increased graduation requirements that include critical science courses, our next generation curriculum standards that hone in on core science concepts and our Race to the Top win that has given us additional resources to concentrate on this vital subject area," Smith said in a statement.

During a conference call with reporters, DOE officials acknowledged that the scores could go down next year. That's because this year's test results will be used as the benchmark for the passing scores used for the FCAT 2.0.

Smith said Monday that the scoring of the FCAT tests went better this year and the state did not have the same delays that occurred a year ago. State officials also acknowledged that they beefed up monitoring this year to look for any anomalies in test scores and that some tests were invalidated. Recently, standardized test scores in other states and Washington D.C. have come under question due to possible cheating.

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Florida's graduation rates: pathetic, padded, progressing

St. Petersburg Times

By: Ron Matus

June 7, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/floridas-graduation-rates-pathetic-padded-progressing>

This year's Diplomas Count report from Education Week offers more evidence that Florida's high school graduation can be bad and inflated and actually moving in the right direction all at once.

Released this morning, the report finds that Florida's graduation rate in 2008 was 63.9 percent putting it at No. 44 nationally. That's lower than the national rate of 71.7 percent (which makes it pathetic), and far lower than the state reported rate that year of 73.1 percent (which lends credence to the fact that the state rate is padded by practices like removing adult education transfers from the cohorts.)

But just like it did last year, Ed Week also found that Florida's graduation rate is one of the fastest-rising in the country. It moved up 12.4 percentage points between 1998 and 2008, more than twice the national increase of 6.1 percentage points. Only Tennessee, North Carolina and New York had bigger gains over that period.

Nationally, the grad rate rose nearly three percentage points in 2008, up from 68.8 percent in 2007. That was a big jump after years of decline and stagnation.

Ed Week uses its own formula and federal data to calculate grad rates.

Its report also looked at the grad rates for the 50 biggest school districts. Pinellas came in at No. 18, with a 67.3 percent rate, and it had the second-highest rate among the 10 Florida districts on the list. Lee was highest among the Florida districts, at 68.7 percent. Hillsborough came in at 63.8 percent.

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Duval's ambitious reading program kicks off today

Florida Times-Union

By: Topher Sanders

June 7, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2011-06-07/story/duvals-ambitious-reading-program-kicks-today>

Duval County Public Schools is scheduled to launch an ambitious initiative today to change the culture of Jacksonville, and more poignantly improve the district's reading scores.

Read It Forward Jax is a \$5.5 million reading initiative that aims to have every child reading on grade level. The district has not set a time frame for that goal, but it is calling on faith-based, business and government segments of the Jacksonville community to help.

The district is announcing the initiative at 10 a.m. at Matthew Gilbert Middle School with Mayor-elect Alvin Brown, Mayor John Peyton and Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce Chairman Hugh Greene in attendance.

Only 34 percent of Duval's 10th-graders read at or above grade level, according to the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test results released Monday. It's the lowest percentage of 10th-graders reading at or above grade level among the state's six largest counties.

Related: Duval's intervene schools continue to struggle in FCAT reading

The district hopes to change that by increasing its attention to reading, particularly focusing on kindergarten through third grade.

A child's reading ability in the K-3 years can be the difference between success and failure, officials say.

"It's the foundation of everything," said Jacqueline Bowen, the district's supervisor of reading. "It's is the ultimate equalizer [and] finally we've got people's attention so that maybe we can make sure all kids love reading. It's a battle that you can't do alone."

Superintendent Ed Pratt-Dannals said he wants the initiative to change Jacksonville to a city of readers with adults serving as reading ambassadors to children.

Most of the initiative's funding is going to professional development for teachers on reading instruction, and summer school sessions focused on reading that will serve about 9,400 students this first summer.

Board Chairman W.C. Gentry said the district will now use a higher standard than the state's to determine proficiency because the state's standard is too low to ensure success for students as they matriculate.

"We want kindergarten to be first-grade, we want first-grade to be on steroids," Gentry said.

TV textbook pilot

More than \$3.8 million will be spent on summer school for students who are non-proficient at reading. Another \$740,000 will be used to train elementary and secondary teachers this summer and through the school year.

One of the initiative's programs that has its coordinators excited is the TV Textbook, a collaboration between the district and Comcast to bridge the Internet gap between some of the district's students and families. TV Textbook will allow families without the Internet to access academic programs through their television.

The district is conducting a pre-pilot of the TV Textbook this summer with 50 families and will roll out an actual pilot this fall to an anticipated 500 families. The TV Textbook units cost about \$60 per family, and the district is looking for businesses to help more families get access.

The district is also going to ask the Jacksonville community to sponsor libraries in every classroom in the district.

Jeanne Ballentine, Duval's executive director for secondary programs, said the initiative's success will be measured on the district's performance on the FCAT.

Reading is the crossroad of life, Gentry said.

"It's the whole ballgame," he said. "A child is highly unlikely to graduate from high school if they are not a proficient reader at the end of third grade."

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STATE NEWS

Opinion: "School Choice" is a parent's right

New Jersey Star-Ledger

By: Aref Assaf

June 7, 2011

"It is only the tyranny of the status quo that leads us to take it for granted that in schooling, government monopoly is the best way for the government to achieve its objective." —*The School Choice Advocate* (January 2004)

This is a topic of great interest to our NJ Muslim community educators and parents. They just don't know it yet. It's about school choice. It is a topic that interfaith groups especially need to consider. State Senator Tony Bucco (R-25) recently introduced The New Jersey Parental Choice bill. If you are into legalese, then you will enjoy reading the bill. If you are not, then know this: As a parent who pays property taxes to fund public education, I should have the right to send my children to any school in the system or outside of it. I know what's best for my children.

"School choice", "school vouchers" and "parental choice" are acronyms for an idea devised over 56 years ago by the late Noble laureate Milton Friedman who argued then that government monopoly of public schools has failed to produce the expected educational services to our children. Milton Friedman came up with the idea of a universal voucher system, where the money follows the child to the school chosen by the parents. Concisely put, Friedman argues almost that by separating government financing of education from government administration of schools, parents at all income levels would have the freedom to choose the schools their children attend. This is also a hot topic where political affiliations stand clear of any reasonable compromise any time soon. For some, this choice is racism in disguise, of selfish priorities at the expense of societal benefits. Opponents believe that if parents are given the chance to place their children in the schools they feel most fit for their expectations, then the public school system will be devoid of smart and gifted students, and more importantly, school funding will be broken. They further argue that increasing educational choice is likely to increase separation of students by race, social class, and cultural background. Research conducted by James Coleman found that segregation by race and economic class were more severe in public schools than in private schools, even though the public school system enrolls a higher total percentage of minority students.

Supporters, on the other hand, argue that education of their children is a service they pay for but one which they cannot effectively evaluate based on the performance of the school. Parents should be able to send their children to the school of their choice and without being burdened by additional tuition fees. Pro school choice pundits argue that greater choice in public education is likely, by itself, to increase either the variety of programs available to students or the overall performance of schools. And this is what Harvard economist Caroline Minter-Hoxby has shown to be false in her 1997 paper titled "Evidence on School Choice: What We Learn from the Traditional Forms of School Choice in the U.S." In that work, Minter-Hoxby demonstrates that increased competition between schools and increased parental choice of schools and school districts does indeed have some positive effect on academic achievement, but the improvements are modest and little innovation and variety can be traced to choice programs which limit themselves to the public sector. Finally, a landmark 2007 study on school choice by Dr. Herbert J. Walberg concludes that the consensus of the high-quality international research overwhelmingly "favors competition and parental choice in education over the monopoly systems that dominate the United States and many other industrialized countries."

As small but emerging religious group, American Muslims are natural proponents of school choice. Yet it is a topic that is rarely discussed. Some would argue that civil and religious rights violations have overshadowed other important considerations. Educating their children in Muslim school is a dream for many due to the shortage of such schools and more importantly because of the additional tuition they must pay. However, the community has been absent from the political debate over school choice. This disconnect between core positions and political engagement is unsustainable, ill conceived and must be reversed.

American Muslims are not part of the local or national grassroots movement. This in part may explain why their concerns are not on the table. If we as taxpaying parents choose to send our kids to private schools (Muslim schools), we should not be forced to pay for their education twice: one in property taxes and the other in school tuition. Parents should be able to receive a scholarship equal to the taxes paid when they take their children into another school outside of their district.

There are about twenty State-accredited Muslim schools in New Jersey excluding the weekend schools which are not accredited (See list below). Here is an opportunity for American Muslims to ensure that their children receive a proper education in a school of their choosing. Just imagine if we succeeded, the financial burden on Muslim parents, many of whom cannot afford the close to \$1000 a month in tuition per child, will no longer exist.

As the NJ Muslim population soon reaches close to the one million mark, we must begin to advocate our preferences relating to the education of our children. Our choices will need to migrate to the public sphere. Our leaders, community, religious, intellectual and academic, should endeavor to hold a conference outlining the pros and cons of school choice.

Politicians pay careful attention to grassroots positions if such positions mean a political windfall for them. Thus far, we do not exist on the political radar of policy makers in whom we have placed our trust to do what's right for us and our children. One such position is to hedge our political and financial support for political candidates based on their position on school choice.

Do not be surprised when you find out that most Democratic politicians are not in favor school choice for reasons I will allude to in a future column. In case you do not know, our current Republican Governor, Chris Christie, is an avid proponent of the school choice idea making him a natural enemy for the powerful teacher unions. He is moving in the right direction, I believe. He has signed The Interdistrict Public School Choice Act of 2010 which allows students and their families by providing students with the option of attending a public school outside their district of residence without cost to their parents. Noticelby, only 74 schools have so far opted to join this program. The law, to take effect this coming school year, however, expressly excludes private schools from participating in this program. Senator Bucco's bill attempts to remove the restriction.

I am an advocate for public education, lest anyone have doubts. I think it is the most important duty of our government. My five children have all gone through the public school system. By any measure they have received an excellent education. It is no secret however that the US lags behind many less advanced nation in educational performance. For me I know that if I were given the choice and a Muslim school existed nearby, I would have opted for the Muslim school. This is my personal choice to ensure my children receive sufficient spiritual and academic instruction. Lacking such an option placed additional burdens on the family. While I support the mandate for public education, I still believe public schools are not the only vehicles to deliver on such a mandate. Freedom of choice is the heart of democracy.

Aref Assaf, PhD
American Arab Forum

P.S: Three schools , run by IEF, operate in Northern New Jersey while one school operates in Central New Jersey. The first Islamic school in NJ, Al-Ghastly School, was founded in 1984. I am in the process of concluding a paper on the status of Muslim schools in New Jersey and will report my findings soon.

I am in the process of drafting a speech for presentation at a conference on school choice and would love to hear from you. A shorter column is planned as well. Regardless of where you stand on this issue, I welcome your careful comments. Please forward this column to your links in education, school boards and mosque funding organs.

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Opinion: Smith: School turnaround companies not a sure thing; let community try 1st

Indianapolis Star
By: Erika D. Smith
June 5, 2011

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20110605/NEWS19/106050359/>

Dear Mr. Tully,

I agree with you and the state's superintendent of public instruction, Tony Bennett, on one thing:

It's sad that we as a community have let Indianapolis Public Schools get to this point. Few could look at the performance of the seven district schools under threat of a state takeover and feel any other way.

Everyone wants to do something to turn things around. Continuing to do nothing is absolutely unacceptable.

But doing something doesn't mean we should try anything. And, in my book, allowing the state to take over any of the schools and then turn them over to a management company definitely counts as "anything."

Who's to say a private and possibly out-of-state company would do any better than a locally run and elected school board?

After all, the research on the effectiveness of these turnaround companies is anything but conclusive. Even those who support them admit that.

"There really isn't a big track record for many of these groups to stand on," said M. René Islas, an education consultant who has worked in Indianapolis and is the director of the Learning Forward Center for Results. "We're kind of in uncharted territory."

Kind of like California during the Gold Rush.

Never before has there been \$5 billion of federal funding available to turn around failing schools. Education Secretary Arne Duncan hopes to overhaul 5,000 of the nation's 100,000 public schools in the next few years.

A lot of those turnaround efforts, as is the case here, involve paying a private, for-profit company to overhaul schools.

Yet nationwide, oversight of these companies hasn't been the best. Many of them are new, formed in response to a burgeoning market for fixing schools, and they have yet to establish proven records of success.

And the privatization of government services doesn't always work.

The botched attempt to modernize Indiana's welfare system comes to mind. Gov. Mitch Daniels pulled the plug on the \$1.3 billion contract with IBM less than three years into the supposed 10-year implementation.

Do we really want to take that chance with our schools? With our children?

What happens if the state hires a turnaround company, and then a year from now or two years from now, test scores at a school don't go up?

Will Bennett fire that company and hire a new one? Will that new company once again fire half the staff and oust the principal?

These are things we need to think about long before we consider crossing the bridge into state takeover land.

Why? Because, above all else, students need stability and consistency.

This came through loud and clear at both of last week's meetings to gather public feedback on the possible state takeover.

At Arlington Community High School, teachers and parents complained about the inconsistent meting out of discipline and the rotating cast of principals and teachers over the past four years.

At Broad Ripple, IPS Superintendent Eugene White pointed out that the school is only in its second year of being a full magnet high school for the arts.

My point is, there hasn't been enough consistency or stability at either of these schools for the students or teachers to develop any kind of traction for success.

"The research tells us that the full turnaround of any organization takes three to five years," Islas said.

Ripping everything up again at these schools likely would do more harm than good.

What do we do instead?

Let the community take up this fight first.

One result of Bennett saying the state should intervene has been that parents and community groups appear to be serious about improving education.

The Indianapolis Urban League has vowed to work with the NAACP and the National Council on Educating Black Children to help implement improvement plans at all the schools.

This should have happened years ago when students' grades first started to slide, but that's a gripe for another day.

The success of students depends as much on what goes on in the classroom as at home. Without support from parents and the community, kids, especially kids in poor urban districts, have a much harder time making the grade. Their involvement could make all the difference.

Let the community and parents try again. Don't take these schools out of their hands just yet.

That's a "something" I can get behind.

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Louisiana Panel forwards private school tax deduction bill to full House

Baton Rouge Advocate

By: Marsha Shuler

June 7, 2011

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/Panel-forwards-private-school--tax-deduction-bill-to-full-House.html>

Parents who send their children to private and parochial schools would get an income tax deduction of up to \$5,000 under a bill that cleared a House panel Monday morning.

The House Ways and Means committee voted 10-3 to advance the Senate-passed legislation which would allow parents to deduct up to \$5,000 of tuition costs paid per child.

For instance, if tuition costs for a child came to \$10,000 a year, only \$5,000 of it would be tax deductible.

The break would take effect Jan. 1.

The Legislative Fiscal Office estimates the increased tax deduction would cost the state at least \$5.3 million annually.

Under existing law, parents can take off 50 percent of tuition costs up to \$5,000 per child.

Senate Bill 13 sponsored by state Sen. Rob Marionneaux, D-Grosse Tete, would remove the 50 percent cap.

In 2009, parents claimed the tuition deduction for 76,900 children, the first year the deduction was offered.

The average deduction was \$3,186 per child.

The Louisiana Family Forum endorsed the measure.

Opposition came from the Louisiana School Boards Association, the Louisiana Federation of Teachers and the Louisiana Association of Educators.

LFT President Steve Monaghan said the expansion of the tax deduction is coming at the same time public schools will be furloughing teachers and increasing class sizes.

“It’s the wrong message to send to the teachers in the classroom right now suffering through some difficult times,” Monaghan said.

“This one (tax exemption) hits hard because of where it hits and when it hits,” he added.

Gary Reed, of the Louisiana School Boards Association, said the legislation takes away revenue that could be used to fund public schools.

Marionneaux said the state has \$7.1 billion in tax breaks, most of which benefit business.

“It’s a miniscule amount but important to parents who struggle to send their child to the best school possible. ... who struggle day in and day out to do the best they can for their children,” Marionneaux said.

The bill moves to the full House for final legislative passage.

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Detroit Public Schools launching online resource

Associated Press

By: Staff

June 7, 2011

<http://www.detnews.com/article/20110607/SCHOOLS/106070385/1026/schools/Detroit-Public-Schools-launching-online-resource>

Detroit — Detroit Public Schools officials plan to announce a new online portal providing electronic textbooks, assignments and other resources for parents and students.

The district says officials will provide details about the Internet program today with a tutorial for selected parents.

They also will announce plans to expand a system that will provide greater communication about students' progress through electronic notifications. The district says the system is connected to secure Electronic Grade Book.

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