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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 3/2/12

For more education news, visit *The Ed Fly* at [www.TheEdFly.com](http://www.TheEdFly.com).

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Common Core Brings K-12, Higher Ed. Together**

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

March 1, 2012

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/03/01/23collegeready.h31.html?tkn=SUMF4W3ODgauf1tO%2ByBA6tPcumsCLxyxKQBH&cmp=clp-edweek>

*Louisville, Ky.*- If college and university faculties do not embrace the common-core standards as solid indicators of college readiness, what do the standards mean?

That was one of the big questions hovering over a national forum here this week about how precollegiate and higher education can work together to use the new English/language arts and mathematics standards as the basis for stronger curricula, instruction, teacher preparation, and college success.

The [three-day gathering](#) was organized to showcase Kentucky's push to bring its K-12 and higher education systems together to improve students' preparation for further study after high school. Twenty-two states sent representatives, mostly from the higher education sector, to hear about projects that contribute to what University of Maine Chancellor Richard L. Pattenaude called "Kentucky envy."

The forum was organized by the agencies that oversee K-12 and higher education, including teacher preparation, in Kentucky, and national groups representing K-12 and college leaders, such as the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Participants discussed many projects that reach across the traditional precollegiate-postsecondary divide. An example is Kentucky's newly crafted set of "[college-readiness indicators](#)." All state universities and colleges have agreed to use those sets of cutoff scores on the ACT, the SAT, or state-designed online placement exams to let students skip remedial work in college and enroll directly in credit-bearing entry-level courses. Only a handful of states, [such as California](#), have similar agreements. Pivotal to such initiatives is the idea that secondary schools and colleges must see eye to eye on what strengths students must have in order to enter college or technical programs with a strong foundation. The idea is central to the [Common Core State Standards](#) and to tests being designed to reflect them.

#### *Many Questions*

The difficulty of securing that shared vision, however, was woven through many of the discussions at the Feb. 27-29 forum. At a session about [the common assessments](#), which are being designed by two consortia of states with federal Race to the Top money, consortium representatives asked for input to help shape the tests tied to the common core.

Allison Jones, who is overseeing higher education engagement for one of the groups, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, asked the participants what their institutions' faculty members need to see in the tests if they are to have confidence that they truly are proxies for college readiness.

Proof that the eventual cutoff scores connote the same kinds of readiness as the ACT and the SAT college-entrance exams, said a Louisiana higher education administrator. Multiple scores showing students' skills in various areas, rather than just one cutoff score, another participant said. Evidence that the new tests will be better than current, widely used placement tests, said a math professor from Oregon. Confirmation that the tests thoroughly capture the standards on which they are based, said a participant from Indiana.

Open questions about how well the coming assessments will reflect college-level skills go to the heart of the standards' potential value. Representatives of higher education were on the panels that designed the standards, and the presidents of the higher education systems in the states that are designing the tests have pledged to help shape assessments that can be used as course-placement tools.

But whether college faculty members can ultimately support what the tests aim to say about students—that they are qualified to go right into credit-bearing entry-level classes—remains to be seen.

Even as they posed tough questions to leaders of forum sessions, participants found much to admire in the work Kentucky and other states described to make partners of K-12 and higher education. Much of that work has been fueled by the broad embrace of the common standards, which were unveiled in 2010 and have been adopted by all but four states. Kentucky adopted them two years ago, before any other state, and did so in an unusual, joint move by its K-12 and higher education boards. ("[Kentucky Is First State to Adopt Common Academic Standards.](#)" Feb. 24, 2010.)

"We are sitting here talking, K-12 and higher ed. together, because of these standards," said Kelly Nelson, a consultant to the Indiana higher education commission.

Kentucky's push for precollegiate and postsecondary partnership is driven also by a sweeping 2009 legislative mandate called [Senate Bill 1](#). That law demands that K-12, colleges, and teacher-preparation programs work together to make sure students are well prepared for their futures. The combined effects of that legislation and the common-standards adoption were vividly illustrated in presentations during the forum.

### *Bridging a Gulf*

The Education Professional Standards Board, which oversees teacher certification in Kentucky, has decided to require training in literacy instruction for all candidates seeking elementary, middle school, or high school certification, said Allen E. Kennedy, who serves on that group's board. .

Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear, who attended the event, said the state had also toughened requirements for entrance into teacher-preparation programs.

A year and a half ago, Kentucky formed a statewide system of [regional leadership networks](#) that facilitate monthly conversations among teacher leaders and state-chosen content specialists in math and in English/language arts, along with college faculty members in those subjects. Similar meetings are held for school and district leaders.

Intended as a vehicle for implementing the common standards and improving teaching, the networks bridge traditional gulfs between K-12 and higher education, said Karen Kidwell, who oversees them at the state education department.

Leslie D. Burns, the chairman of the English education program faculty at the University of Kentucky's college of education, said that through those networks, he meets with K-12 teachers regularly to develop instructional units that integrate the common standards' demands for skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Cherry Boyles, the instructional supervisor in Kentucky's Washington County schools, said she and colleagues work closely with the faculty of nearby St. Catharine College. "We are seeing faculty from the college involved in [professional development] for our teachers," she said.

Western Kentucky University teamed up with the Shelby County school district to create a monthlong, half-day summer program for rising 8th and 10th graders with shaky reading skills. The university and high school created a reading list that tilted heavily to nonfiction, to reflect the common standards' emphasis on informational text.

Nearly half the students who attended improved by the equivalent of one year of instruction, and teachers who were trained in the program learned useful new approaches to teaching literacy, said Kerry Fannin, the 6,500-student district's assistant superintendent.

Murray State University created a program that hosts meetings of its faculty with K-12 teachers in three nearby districts. Over dinner, they talk about college-level expectations in writing and share student work, said Debbie Bell English, a lecturer who directs the Purchase Area Writing Project there.

### *A Bumpy Road*

Reaching across traditional divides, however, is fraught with stumbling blocks. Even as scores of educators meet to discuss the standards, "agreeing on a common interpretation of those standards" is a work in progress, Ms. Kidwell said.

"We have multiple deans, departments, people, department chairs that all have their own ideas of what college readiness means," said Dan Ash, a former higher education administrator who now oversees research for 55,000 Degrees, a Louisville-based group aimed at improving college completion.

Many forum attendees noted the big shift required of teachers to teach the new standards. Participants in a session about the math standards identified "teachers' skills and content knowledge" as one of the biggest obstacles to implementation. Because some topics now must be taught in lower grade levels, teachers will have to "brush up on stuff they might not have been doing," said Michael Shires, a former math teacher who is now the principal of Lindeman Elementary School in Erlanger, Ky.

"Some of the new content will create the need for new pedagogies," said Seth Hunter, a math specialist on loan to the Kentucky education department.

"There is a lot of mathematical growth that has to happen very quickly, and I'm not even sure it's manageable," said Jonathan N. Thomas, an assistant professor of mathematics education at Northern Kentucky University.

Many candidates in teacher-preparation programs are "mathematically fragile," showing great difficulty with fractions, "and we're talking about doing fractions, not even teaching them," Mr. Thomas said. Yet he wondered whether professional-development programs for in-service teachers would be well received if they were geared to content instead of instructional strategy.

Another challenge to K-12 and higher education collaboration on the common standards centers on skills not required—or only implicitly required—by the standards.

David T. Conley, a University of Oregon professor whose work argues for broader definitions of career and college readiness, [told the forum attendees](#) that there is a need to "assess beyond the common core" to ensure that students are learning key skills for postsecondary training.

Besides core-content knowledge Mr. Conley said, students need to demonstrate important thinking skills that help them apply what they know. They also need to show that they've mastered learning strategies such as goal-setting and monitoring their own progress, and the "privileged knowledge" required to make the transition to college, such as understanding its admissions and financial-aid requirements.

Mr. Conley urged attendees to resist using one score in an either-or approach to readiness, but to think instead about "profiles" of readiness, an approach that allows for different types and levels of readiness depending on what a student is aiming to do. "Don't assume all students need the same kinds of knowledge to succeed," he said.

Precollegiate and postsecondary education have "a long, long way to go" before they turn out students who meet employers' and professors' needs, said Debra Humphreys, the vice president for communications and public affairs at the Washington-based Association of American Colleges and Universities.

[The association's research](#)  shows that employers, for instance, find recent college graduates deficient in teamwork skills and effective oral and written communication, she said. Particularly important to college faculty members, she noted, are skills in inquiry, research, analysis, innovation, and the ability to integrate knowledge from varied disciplines.

*Special coverage on the alignment between K-12 schools and postsecondary education is supported in part by a grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education, at [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org).*

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Florida House passes 'parental trigger' bill**

Associated Press

By: Bill Kaczor

March 1, 2012

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/03/01/2669630/florida-house-passes-parental.html>

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Parents could "trigger" a plan to turn around a failing school, including handing it over to a private management company under a bill that cleared the Republican-controlled Florida House on a largely party line vote Thursday.

The bill (HB 1191), which is based on a similar parental trigger law in California, next goes to the Senate where a similar measure (SB 1718) is awaiting final committee action.

A school district would be required to implement a turnaround plan if a majority of a school's parents vote for it. Supporters say such a law would encourage parents to become more engaged in their children's education.

"When we give our parents choices, they get more involved. Nobody else in this process looks out for the students like the parents," said Kelly Stargell, a Lakeland Republican and mother of five.

Opponents argued private management or charter school companies would be able to take advantage of the legislation to profit by obtaining control over public assets although the legislation would prohibit the use of paid signature collectors.

"Private entities and charter schools can still make promises, lobby, give gifts to parents to try and influence them to sign," said Rep. Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg.

The roll call was 80-34 with Republicans in favor and most Democrats against. The House rejected an amendment by opponents that would have allowed parents who are unhappy with a turnaround plan to petition for conversion back to a traditional public school.

Florida had 38 schools that received an F in the state's grading system, but changes approved by the State Board of Education on Tuesday are expected to increase that number in the future.

"Our public schools are mediocre compared to the rest of the world," said Rep. Frederick Costello, an Ormond Beach Republican who debated in favor the bill. "Anything that we can do to instill competition, innovation, creativity, the ability for a parent to put that child where that child needs to be - we have got to do it and we've got to do it now."

In opposition, Rep. Dwight Bullard said Finland copied the United States' 20th century school system because it was then the world's best by making all schools public and not interfering with teachers.

"Do what Finland does, let the teachers teach, let the children learn," the Miami Democrat urged.

Opponents also noted the bill is opposed by parent groups such as the Florida PTA and Fund Education Now, a group that's suing the state over what it contends is insufficient school funding, are among the opponents.

Supporters include StudentsFirst, an organization founded by former Washington D.C. public schools chancellor Michelle Rhee, who has advised Gov. Rick Scott. It's also supported by former Gov. Jeb Bush's Foundation for Florida's Future and California-based Parent Revolution, which successfully lobbied for a trigger law in that state.

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## 'Tebow bill' killed by Virginia Senate committee

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Associated Press

By: Larry O'Dell

March 1, 2012

<http://www.chron.com/news/article/Tebow-bill-killed-by-Va-Senate-committee-3373915.php>

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A [Virginia Senate committee](#) rejected legislation Thursday that would have allowed home-schooled students to play public school sports.

The Education and [Health committee](#) voted 8-7 kill to the "[Tim Tebow](#) bill" — a reference to the [Denver Broncos](#) quarterback who was home-schooled and went on to win a Heisman Trophy and lead the [University of Florida](#) to a national championship.

The meeting room was packed with home-schoolers who supported the bill and a group of [Varina High School](#) athletes who opposed it. Del. [Rob Bell](#), R-Albemarle and sponsor of the bill, said after the meeting that he will reintroduce the legislation next year.

Supporters of the bill, which Gov. [Bob McDonnell](#) supported, said home-schooled children deserve the opportunity to play interscholastic sports because their parents pay taxes to support public schools.

Opponents argued that parents who choose to teach their kids at home know the consequences, and it would be unfair to let those students play without meeting the academic standards that others must meet to remain eligible.

"Every parent of every child in this room has a choice," said Sen. [Richard L. Saslaw](#), D-Fairfax. "They know what the ramifications are."

He said that if the bill passed, home-schoolers would soon be back demanding access to public school labs or other facilities.

But Sen. [Stephen D. Newman](#), R-Lynchburg, emphasized that the bill would give local school divisions the option of allowing home-schoolers to compete. He said the decision should be made by elected school boards rather than the [Virginia High School League](#), the sanctioning body that governs interscholastic athletics.

He also said lawmakers try to put the best interests of children first, and should do so by voting for the bill.

"I would hope we as a committee would step out and hug these children," Newman said.

Sen. Richard Black, R-Loudoun, said Florida "had the good sense to say these parents are paying the same freight as everyone else" and allowed Tebow to play football and become a star.

"I would like to see a Tim Tebow from the state of Virginia," he said.

Republican Sen. [Harry Blevins](#) of Chesapeake, a retired public school educator, voted with the committee's seven [Democrats](#) to defeat the bill.

At least 15 states allow home-schoolers to play interscholastic sports at public schools in their communities, according to the [Home School Legal Defense Association](#). Thirteen states give homes-schooled children conditional or partial opportunities for extracurricular involvement at public schools.

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## South Carolina: Bring sense of urgency to education

Post and Courier

By: Barbara Hairfield

Friday, March 2, 2012

<http://www.postandcourier.com/news/2012/mar/02/bring-senseof-urgencyto-education/>

In mid-February, the state received an urgent wake-up call when the S.C. Education Oversight Committee (EOC) released the annual progress report on its 2020 Vision. The EOC, created by the South Carolina legislature as part of the 1998 Education Accountability Act, is comprised of educators, business leaders and elected officials who take on the role of holding the state accountable for improving K-12 education.

In its 2020 Vision, the EOC has set targets in four key areas--reading proficiency, graduation rates, workforce readiness, and at-risk schools--to ensure that by the year 2020, South Carolina students will have the knowledge and skills to compete in the global economy.

The stark data from the report revealed that South Carolina is not making measurable progress in many educational areas. Pockets of excellence do exist, but the state as a whole is static. Simply put, South Carolina is not going to meet the educational goals set for the year 2020 if the state does not set the stage for dramatic and sustained improvement.

All South Carolinians need a new sense of urgency about this limited progress. With a renewed commitment and a laser-like focus on educational improvement, our state must commit the needed resources and take purposeful and strategic action. We cannot afford to be complacent any longer.

In reading proficiency, the goal is that by 2020, 95 percent of all students in grades 3 and 8 will be reading on grade level. Analyzing state and national assessments, South Carolina is not on target to meet this goal. In addition, the percentage of all students who read on grade level actually decreases as students move through school. As reported on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's report card, South Carolina currently ranks 39th in fourth grade and 38th in eighth grade reading proficiency.

The report also reflects sobering statistics on South Carolina's achievement gaps among students of different ethnicities. For example, 2011 NAEP results for South Carolina's fourth graders show that the number of African-American students reading on grade level trails the number of white students by 30 percent.

South Carolina also is not having dramatic, needed improvements in graduation rates, a second area addressed in the 2020 Vision. This goal is that by 2020, 88.3 percent of students will graduate on time. In 2011, South Carolina schools are still 15 percent below that target, and no demographic group -- white, Hispanic, African American -- will meet this goal if current trends remain.

Workforce readiness is the third 2020 Vision measure. In 2011, 65.9 percent of students graduating from our public high schools were enrolled the following fall in a two- or four-year college or technical school, 20 percent below the goal for 2020.

The fourth accountability measurement is the number of schools rated "at risk" based on the standards for academic achievement and graduation rates. The goal is that by 2020, no school in South Carolina will be "at risk," but as of 2011, the state still has 69 schools that fall into this category.

The message revealed in the 2020 Vision progress report is a critical one for all South Carolinians. Improving education will take every person in this state stepping up to the plate and sharing in the responsibility. As an educator, I ask other educators to recognize that we cannot rectify this dire situation alone. True educational transformation will require all of us -- educators, parents, students, business and elected leaders -- working together to achieve educational excellence.

We face a large challenge, but rising to meet the challenge is the right thing to do for South Carolina's children and our state's economic prosperity. Now is the time for us to renew the promise of providing all children in South Carolina with a world-class education, so that our state and citizens can succeed in the global economy.

To learn how you can get involved, visit the EOC's website at [www.eoc.sc.gov](http://www.eoc.sc.gov).

*Barbara Hairfield, social studies curriculum specialist and Teaching American History Grant Project director for the Charleston County School District, is vice chair of the S.C. Education Oversight Committee.*

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## Louisiana education reforms criticized

Baton Rouge Advocate

By: Marsha Sills

March 2, 2012

<http://theadvocate.com/home/2196741-125/education-reforms-criticized.html>

"New Orleans itself is the best evidence that the country has that low-income kids can learn at the highest level." John White, state superintendent of education e\_SF1b

LAFAYETTE — Education reforms that emphasize standardized testing, voucher programs and charter schools won't fix what's wrong in public schools, former federal education policy adviser Diane Ravitch told school board members from across the state Thursday.

"We should stop investing so much in testing, in accountability, in consultants and start investing more in children," Ravitch said during the Louisiana School Boards Association conference Thursday.

Ravitch is a former U.S. assistant secretary of education during the George H.W. Bush administration. During the Clinton administration, she served as an adviser on national testing standards.

Once an advocate of the federal law called No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Ravitch has become an outspoken opponent of the law and details her views in her 2010 book "The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education."

"We've had a full decade now of No Child Left Behind," she said. "We now know that this law has been a failure."

Ravitch said her views changed when she saw examples of testing being used as "a blunt instrument to reward and punish

teachers in schools” and charter schools were skimming the best students out of public schools rather than serving the neediest students.

She criticized education reforms such as those proposed by Gov. Bobby Jindal for consideration in the upcoming legislative session, including those that expand voucher programs, revamp teacher tenure and enact merit pay practices.

The current reform movement in Louisiana and elsewhere in the country is based on the “fanatical belief” that the cure-all for schools rests with standardized testing, Ravitch said.

“Yet, the testing experts warn us that the tests should be used only for diagnostic purposes, not to fire teachers, not to close schools, not to label children,” she said. “The basic rule of testing is that a test should be used only for the purpose for which it was designed.”

So, a test that measures a student’s eighth-grade reading level should not be used as to measure teacher quality or for any other purpose, she said.

Louisiana Superintendent of Education John White defended the state’s new plan to evaluate teachers and the need for reform.

“It’s easy to sit and poke holes and say this hasn’t worked,” White said in a conference call with reporters late Thursday afternoon.

“We need solutions and we need change,” he said.

He touted schools in post-Katrina New Orleans as an example of successful reform.

“New Orleans itself is the best evidence that the country has that low-income kids can learn at the highest level,” he said.

Ravitch encouraged the audience of school board members to stand up against proposed reforms that pull money out of their local public schools.

“You’re the stewards of your communities,” Ravitch said. “You’re the stewards of public schools whose doors are open to all children; where you don’t have to enter a lottery to get in the school down the street.”

“You have a public trust. Be strong, be resolute in fighting against the privatization and the corporate takeover of your schools. Your tax dollars built them. Don’t let the governor give them away to entrepreneurs and Wall Street hedge-fund managers,” she said.

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## **CHIEFS FOR CHANGE IN THE NEWS**

### **Tennessee education chief sets lofty goals, says failing schools unacceptable**

DNJ.Com

By: Mealand Ragland-Hudgins

March 1, 2012

<http://www.dnj.com/article/20120302/NEWS07/303020031>

NASHVILLE — Kevin Huffman has had a busy first year on the job in his role as the state’s education commissioner.

He joined Gov. Bill Haslam’s administration in April of last year after serving as vice-president of public affairs for Teach for America.

Since then, the state applied for and successfully obtained a waiver from the federal government’s No Child Left Behind regulations and adopted a teacher evaluation model that has caused stress to many educators and administrators. Huffman invited reporters to his office and talked about the changes public education has gone through in the last year and what’s coming down the pike.

With the granting of the waiver, the success of Tennessee schools will be determined on the achievement students make on a yearly basis. The waiver was approved in order to be exempted from the 10-year-old law in exchange for a promise to improve the way schools teach and evaluate students. Tennessee proposed to raise overall achievement by 3 percent to 5 percent every year for the next eight years, and cut the achievement gap in half during that same time.

“So many of our schools are failing. Within the bottom 5 percent of schools statewide, we’re talking about schools where 10 percent of the students are testing proficient,” Huffman said. “It’s totally unacceptable.”

Of the 86 schools making up the bottom 5 percent, all but 16 are in Memphis. The rest are evenly split between Metro Nashville

and Hamilton County. All of those schools are eligible to fall under the state's Achievement School District, which has the sole goal of turning around the state's lowest-performing schools.

With the waiver, schools can receive incentives for being among the top 5 percent for student growth or overall achievement. Murfreesboro City's Cason Lane Academy, Hobgood Elementary and Discovery School at Reeves-Rogers fall into that category, according to information from the state. Rutherford County schools making the necessary progress were Central Magnet (middle and high), Barfield Elementary, Eagleville (elementary and middle), McFadden School of Excellence and Campus School.

Huffman said the goal is to not have any schools in the Achievement School District and continue to raise the [performance](#) of all schools in general.

"That's going to put a lot of pressure on other schools to do better," he said. "Even if things get better, we're still going to be behind. We have to come to grips and be honest about where we are (compared to other states)."

County schools Director Harry Gill Jr. said the newly-approved waiver is "much more reasonable" than NCLB.

"The challenges will still be there. The only thing I don't like is that it's totally based on achievement rather than value-added. Some district's won't have kids that achieve as well," Gill said.

Education officials will use national assessments every two years to gauge where Tennessee students stands with their peers across the country. Tennessee ranks as high as 41st in some areas and as low as 46th based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Additionally, the state has adopted the Common Core standards, developed by teachers, school administrators and education experts. The idea is to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare the nation's students for college and the [workforce](#). A set of standards exists for English/language arts and math. All but five states have adopted the standards.

"The math portion takes away about half of the standards teachers are teaching now just because it's on the test. It'll be a matter of going in depth with what's being taught in order to create higher-order thinking," Huffman explained, noting that 2014-15 is the first year students will be tested on the standards. "With reading, there will more emphasis on social studies and current events and learning how that applies to every day situations."

Meanwhile, the teacher evaluation process adopted prior to the start of the current school year will be tweaked. Teachers are graded on a five-point scale for each of the observations they undergo each year. Depending on experience, between four and six observations could be held per teacher. Their tenure is tied to the process.

Both Rutherford County and Murfreesboro City schools had district-wide averages of teachers scoring a level 5.

Huffman said the state's process was only to be considered a default, but districts did have the flexibility to create their own. Several took advantage of the latter option, he said.

"For the adjustments that will be made, we'll make sure they're appropriate. We want districts to feel like they have ownership of the process," the commissioner added.

When the NAEP report card was released a few years ago, it was made clear that Tennessee students were not performing as well as many thought.

"Education is a results-type of [business](#). Our scores have to come up," Huffman said. "By 2015, we should be the fastest-improving state in the country. Someone has to be it and it should be us."

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