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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 12/5/11

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### NATIONAL NEWS

## Jeb Bush: With charter package, Michigan will lead nation in school reform

By: Jeb Bush

Detroit Free Press

December 4, 2011

<http://www.freep.com/article/20111205/OPINION05/111204035/Guest-commentary-charter-package-Michigan-will-lead-nation-school-reform?odyssey=mod%7Cnewswell%7Ctext%7CFRONTPAGE%7Cs>

In today's competitive global economy, it is imperative that every student graduates high school prepared for college or a career. The success of these students will determine the destiny of Michigan and the nation.

Unfortunately, Michigan students are falling behind other states in math and reading, according to the National Assessment for Educational Progress, also called Nation's Report Card for K-12 students. During the period in which all 50 states have taken these tests, Michigan's low-income students achieved gains well below the national average. Michigan's middle- and higher-income students fared no better, also failing to keep pace with the rate of progress nationally.

Michigan children deserve better. A strong embrace of parental choice and new technologies can provide parents with the ability to customize education to meet the needs of the child.

Thanks to the leadership of Gov. Rick Snyder and Michigan legislators including Sen. Pavlov, the state is leading the nation in advancing bold education reform. Reforms currently under consideration in the Legislature—providing more choices and harnessing the power of technology in education—are based on the fundamental belief that all students should have access to a customized education that empowers them to achieve their God-given capacity to learn. And these reforms allow freedom, innovation and competition to reshape the education system around the goal of ensuring student success.

Today, the parents of a quarter of America's students have chosen schools other than their zoned district school. Various parental choice mechanisms such as open enrollment, magnet schools and charter schools have continued to expand and enjoy broad bipartisan support across the country. Yet, limits on educational choice exist. Such limits hurt the most disadvantaged students - those whose parents cannot afford private school tuition or a home in a high-performing school district.

Knowing that a quality education can change a life, state leaders must empower parents to select the learning environment that best fits their child's needs. Expanding high-quality options, such as charter schools and digital learning, will ensure each and every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Under Michigan law, universities have authorized public school academies to broaden educational options available to parents. The current law has an arbitrary cap on the number of academies which universities can authorize, which protects the interests of districts rather than those of children. Michigan's system of university oversight is widely admired across the country, and the students with the fewest options need new schools the most. Lawmakers should open the door for new academies.

Technology has transformed the world we live in. Almost every facet of life has been transformed because of advances in technology - except one of the most important, education. Digital learning has the power to transform education by extending the reach of quality teachers, expanding access to rigorous courses and empowering every student to receive a personalized education that equips them for success beyond high school.

Around the country, innovators are expanding educational options from the school down to the course level. Virtual learning provides the opportunity for

students to access advanced and specialized coursework, or personalize their learning based on their interests and needs. Educators can make both advanced placement and remedial coursework available to those students who need and desire them. With this reform package, Michigan's legislative leaders have the opportunity to leverage the power of technology and give students increased opportunities to learn in their own style, at their own pace, anywhere and anytime.

We can and must update our 19th century model of schooling to meet the challenges of the 21st century. A school system that operates as the equivalent of an 8-track player in an iPod world cannot prepare today's students for success in college and the global economy. Michigan can lead the way in transforming education and securing future prosperity by embracing these reforms, thereby helping every Michigan student achieve their hopes and dreams.

*Jeb Bush is chairman of the Foundation for Excellence in Education and was governor of Florida from 1999 to 2007.*

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## **Louisiana Opinion: Virtual school, an idea that really works**

Shreveport Times

By: Wade Henderson

December 3, 2011

<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/article/20111203/OPINION0106/112030301/Virtual-school-an-idea-really-works?odyssey=mod%7Cnewswell%7Ctext%7CFRONTPAGE%7Cp>

Four years ago, I got involved with several other parents and educators from across Louisiana to try to charter the first statewide online public school, or what is known as a "virtual" school.

I was interested in this concept because as film producers, my wife and I often dreamed of having a school environment which gave our son more flexibility in his schedule so he could travel with us without getting behind in school. An online public school schedule, we reasoned, could almost be as flexible as our filmmaker schedule.

That is how I came to volunteer to help organize Louisiana Connections Academy, and this fall, thanks to the help of many parents across this state, we opened this school to serve 600 children in grades K-12. Our principal is Caroline Wood. I now serve as board chair.

My son, a sixth-grader, is enrolled and my wife serves as his "learning coach," the in-home person who helps keep him accountable for his assignments and diligent in his study.

My son's lessons are tailored to his style of learning. He connects every morning with his teachers and fellow students online, where he is "virtually" in the classroom.

We're all thriving under this new arrangement. My wife and my son have fallen in love with the school, its excellent teachers and their hands-on guidance. World history is my son's new passion and algebra is a fun game for him.

Louisiana Connections Academy is a real place, however, located in Baton Rouge, where Principal Wood, her faculty of certified teachers and staff administrators gather during the school day to teach children like my son.

The classroom is "virtually" anywhere there is a child, a computer and the Internet in Louisiana. Lessons are tailored to the child; textbooks, science equipment, a computer and internet subsidy are provided as part of the school; and field trips are scheduled. In fact, the school just started its field trip program this month.

So, I'm writing to say "Thank you." Thank you to Gov. Bobby Jindal and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for seeing fit to charter this school. Thank you to the Legislature for providing funding for charter education. And most of all, thank you to all the parents, educators, students and community leaders who spoke up and said this program was needed for students from across the state who are academically gifted, those who need extra assistance, those who want or need a flexible schedule, or those seeking an alternative to the traditional classroom — for whatever reason.

Louisiana Connections Academy is working, just like the hundreds of other excellent schools in our state. In addition to building the timeless skills students have always needed for success in school and in life — such as literacy, mathematics and critical thinking — Louisiana Connections Academy is uniquely situated to prepare students for their Information Age future. Join us. <http://www.connectionsacademy.com/louisiana-school/home.aspx>

*Wade Henderson is the president of the Board of Louisiana Connections Academy, which is a new Type 2 charter school. He and his wife own Ocean Star Media in Baton Rouge and have a son in sixth-grade.*

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## **Governor Rick Scott: We must improve education in Florida**

Gainesville Sentinel

By: Governor Rick Scott

December 4, 2011 at 6:01 a.m.

Education pays. According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, education pays two ways: Higher earnings and lower unemployment rates.

The best way to ensure the next generation of Floridians and Americans finds success and continues to grow our economy is to invest in their education, even when our state is facing challenging economic times.

As governor, I am committed to making sure every student gets a good education and the opportunity to get a job. By making sure Florida has the best educated workforce, companies will recognize our state as the best place to tap into the talent that will allow business to grow and succeed.

Part of making sure Florida has the best educated workforce is improving education in the STEM areas of science, technology, engineering and math. Through 2018, Florida will need 120,000 new workers in STEM fields. In spite of this need, fewer than 20 percent of the State University System's graduates are expected to obtain a STEM degree.

For students to be successful in these subjects, we must help them gain the essential building blocks of knowledge and understanding in our elementary, middle and high schools.

While education is essential to Florida's economy, our state is facing a "perfect storm" of unique challenges when it comes to funding education. Let me quickly summarize the budget situation Florida's schools are facing next school year:

- For the 2012-13 school year, we anticipate an increase of more than 30,000 students. At the current funding level of about \$6,262 per student, Florida will need to spend about \$191 million more on education than we are this school year.
- Florida's growing student population comes at a time when we also estimate a three percent loss of local revenue, meaning Florida school districts will have over \$200 million less to spend.
- Add to this deficit the discontinuation of \$554.8 million in federal funds to Florida school districts this year.
- In addition, we will have to overcome the challenge of losing \$224 million in one-time funding from the state of Florida.

When you take these four factors into consideration, we anticipate a total budget gap of about \$1.2 billion for Florida schools.

In spite of this bleak budget picture, I am committed to increasing Florida's investment in the education of our young people. As I see it, investing in education provides a return on investment we simply cannot ignore.

To gain a better understanding of how Florida needs to invest in education, I am meeting with teachers across our state to hear their ideas about to improve our schools and encourage student achievement. Teachers are essential to the success of our schools and our students, and I am confident that those who daily work to inspire children and young people to learn and achieve their dreams can show us the best way to invest Florida's education dollars.

Education pays, and we clearly must find a way to increase our investment in Florida's students. Please share your ideas with me by emailing [Rick.Scott@eog.myflorida.com](mailto:Rick.Scott@eog.myflorida.com).

*Rick Scott is governor of Florida.*

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## **A weekend interview with Rep. Bill Proctor, chairman of the Florida House Education Committee**

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeff Solochek

December 3, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/weekend-interview-rep-bill-proctor-chairman-florida-house-education-committee>

*The Florida Legislature convenes for its 2012 session in just over a month. Much of the buzz relating to education issues this year has centered on taking higher education in the same direction that lawmakers took K-12 last year. House Education Committee chairman [Bill Proctor](#), also chancellor of Flagler College, acknowledged there's been much talk about changing the colleges and universities. But he suggested that the talk might not generate action without additional research and conversation. Proctor offered his thoughts on this and other items likely to arise during session in an interview with reporter Jeff Solochek.*

As we're approaching the legislative session, I wanted to see what issues you see as being most important for the education world. I know that when I talk to school districts, a lot of concern is still focused on teacher evaluations and maybe tweaking SB 736 a little bit. Have you had any issues with that? Or do you have other issues that are critical this year?

Right now the Education Committee ... we have been listening a lot and questioning a lot just with the DOE to try to monitor the implementation of that bill, particularly the teacher evaluation portion of it. And as far as we can tell, it seems to us the DOE is pretty much on schedule with it. That's been the primary interest at this point.

One of the things I have heard from a couple of teachers unions is their concern that the FCAT results, which are going to be used for a portion of the evaluations this year, won't be available until after the hiring and firing season has begun. So people might not have their full results before they are

supposed to find out if they have jobs for the following year. I don't know if that's a technical issue or if it's something that has to be done with law.

I haven't heard that. I can understand why it would be a concern if it's a fact. DOE has not mentioned, as far as I can recall, that possibility to us. I suppose it's possible. But until it emerges, and we have some evidence that that's going to be the case, I don't think we'd be taking any action at this point. If something should surface along that point, we'd like the DOE to give us a recommendation if they believe we should proceed, because we need to meet our commitments on Race to the Top.

Are there other things that are coming up as a result of your conversations with the DOE that will come up related to SB 736? Or are there other things coming up instead?

I haven't heard anything at this point. Of course as you probably already know, they're working with cutoff points, the State Board of Education is. The cutoff points on the school evaluations. And we will be looking at that. We are probably having some appearances on that and some presentations on that to see if there is anything the Legislature needs to do. But right now that seems to be predominantly a State Board of Education issue. ...

The FCAT cutoff scores, there has been dispute over whether they are too high or too low. Have you taken a close look at that yet?

Only to monitor what the SBE is doing. I think it's likely we'll have a report on that to the committee this week.

Are there other things that you would like to have accomplished? School choice issues? I know there are so many other things talked about, and yet, you have done so much over the past couple of years, maybe it's time to take a breath.

The main emphasis right now will be to make sure what we passed last year, to monitor its implementation, to make sure we do it right. Like anything, you are probably going to have to make adjustments as you move along. That's to be expected with any new program. That's where we focus most of our committee meetings through these initial committee weeks. We probably will start looking at some aspects of higher education in the not so distant future, because as you know there are so many plans out there. There's the Texas plan, and the revised Texas plan, and there's the Council of 100 and the Houston System response. So we've been looking at those plans, studying them carefully. I suspect we will start doing some committee work along that line.

The governor has talked a lot about focusing on the STEM programs, and maybe not focusing on liberal arts. All the universities have submitted these huge reports. Is that going to generate anything more than a lot of talk? Do you feel like there is going to be big change?

I think it would be premature to say. We will have some committee meetings on those topics. Obviously we're going to try to do something with STEM. At least make some recommendations, if not some statutory work. But at the same time, if you look at the Council of 100 report, while they put a lot of emphasis on STEM, they also put a lot of emphasis on strong liberal arts programs. That's the business community position. So we'll probably look at both.

Are there other high priority items for the leadership or for you as chairman that you want to see accomplished this year?

I want to see what we passed last year implemented as effectively as possible. That's No. 1. No. 2, I want to screen through all the various higher education plans that have been offered. But also, I don't think any of them necessarily will fit Florida in their entirety. I think we will have to make adjustments. In that case, we'll probably be talking to I imagine most of the university presidents and other educators, probably from the college/state college system. I think the committee will then come out with some recommendations in the area of higher ed. But we are going to move carefully and meticulously through it.

What about some of the lesser issues that seem to come up every year, like this whole thing about invocations at graduations and things of that nature? I know last year the saggy pants bill made its way through, finally. Are there some people's personal priorities that might be able to find their way through this year?

I haven't given a lot of attention to those types of issues right now. I know there are a couple out there brewing, like should we have advertising on school buses and do you need to continue mandatory P.E. at the middle schools. There are some issues. But it's premature to comment on them. Most of them haven't had an initial committee hearing yet. To try and say what is going to gain any traction, it's too early.

Well, do they deserve any traction? Or will the bigger issues take up the most time?

Well, it depends. The big issues are the ones I've just mentioned to you: The implementation of 736, proper implementation of that, and a careful, meticulous study of the higher ed plans. I think those are two of the big issues. Now, will there be a myriad of bills on the smaller issues? Yes. Will any of those gain traction, as I say, and warrant further hearings? I don't know, until you hear them and the committee questions them and we see what kind of importance they have in the overall process. But I think there will be a myriad of smaller issues, as there were last year.

Okay. I didn't know. I saw the one about the prayers. One about grading parents. The one about P.E., and so forth. ... They seem to come up every year, and every once in a while one or two of them makes their way through. I just didn't know if there is something that has already been ...

I don't have any sense at this point of which ones those might be, if any. I don't have any sense of that yet.

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## **New Jersey Opinion: Perth Amboy superintendent takes on fight over teacher tenure**

New Jersey Star-Ledger The Star-Ledger

By Tom Moran

December 4, 2011

[http://blog.nj.com/njv\\_tom\\_moran/2011/12/perth\\_amboy\\_superintendent\\_tak.html](http://blog.nj.com/njv_tom_moran/2011/12/perth_amboy_superintendent_tak.html)

Janine Caffrey, the schools superintendent in Perth Amboy, could hardly believe the teacher was so incompetent. The kids didn't have needed textbooks. There was no lesson plan. Other teachers complained that students were learning nothing. And when the principal demanded changes, the teacher wouldn't budge.

So Caffrey, a spark plug of energy, left her sparsely furnished office to meet the teacher for a showdown, ready to whap some sense into this person once and for all.

But it didn't work out that way.

"This teacher looked me in the eye and said, 'I won't do it.' Just an outright refusal. And this has happened to multiple people before me. We've done multiple corrective action plans, and it's not achieving any results."

So the teacher won the showdown and is still standing in front of a classroom full of kids every day, supremely secure in defiance.

Only one word can explain this insanity: tenure.

And while the Legislature is mulling reforms that will chip away at this fortress, Caffrey has a bolder idea: Get rid of it altogether.

She has a teacher who washed a child's mouth out with soap, but was returned to the classroom.

Another teacher arrives at work high on drugs nearly every day. "The kids can spot it a mile away," Caffrey says. "It's been going on for at least five years, and there's a file a mile thick with all the interventions. But it keeps happening."

Another flies into rages that are terrifying the kids and fellow staffers. "That keeps me up at night," she says. "There's a real possibility this person could do harm."

So for Caffrey, small reforms simply won't do. She wants to end tenure, to pull it out by the roots and to spread salt over the patch of earth where this weed once grew so that nothing like it can rise in its place, ever.

"I don't understand why people who work in public schools have greater rights and protections than other people," she says. "The people we should be protecting are the children. It should not be about protecting adults."

Caffrey won't win that fight. It is a safe bet that tenure will be with us long after she has passed from this Earth. But it won't be the same beast that she is wrestling with today, because the status quo is so indefensible. Even the teachers union supports significant changes.

The legal labyrinth (outlined in the chart at right) can take years to navigate. Districts have to pay attorneys and continue to pay the bad teachers during most of the process. It can easily cost \$200,000 a pop.

"There are many instances where a teacher is just paid off to go away," Caffrey says.

"That's really what's happening. You're looking at a year or two of salary as payout. So if someone makes \$60,000, they'll hand you a \$120,000 check to go away."

Even her administrators and secretaries are protected by tenure. Caffrey can't fire them, or even demote them, without jumping into the hated tenure vortex.

"This is the single greatest impediment to education improvement in New Jersey, without a doubt," she says.

\* \* \*

To be fair, districts share some of the blame as well. Tenure rules might be crazy, but it is possible to get rid of the worst teachers if the district builds a solid case with a paper trail. In the case of the refusenik teacher, Perth Amboy failed to do that. The teacher had won satisfactory evaluations in the past, as nearly all teachers do.

"I tell the boards: Don't just send love letters," says Philip Stern, an attorney whose Newark firm represents about 50 school districts.

Gov. Chris Christie notes that only 17 bad teachers have lost tenure over the past decade. But many more bad teachers are asked to leave before they get tenure. And most tenure cases end in settlements, so they are not counted as part of that 17.

The Legislature is wrestling with three reform plans. Christie's is the toughest, while the weakest comes from Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan (D-Middlesex), an ally of the New Jersey Education Association. In the middle, but closer to Christie's plan, is one from Sen. Teresa Ruiz (D-Essex), the chairwoman of the Education Committee.

\* \* \*

The big political question is whether Democratic leaders are ready to again defy the teachers union with a tough reform, as they did when they passed pension and health reforms.

This time, the union may have found its political footing.

Its hard line against pension and health reforms gave Christie a ripe target to hit, and he did with deadly effectiveness. But now, the NJEA is putting on a friendly face.

"We've turned a corner," says Vince Giordano, the union's executive director. "We want to be part of the solution."

Yes, this is more spin than substance. The union would speed the process and make it less costly, but it is resisting the heart and soul of the reform plans. (See chart at far right for flash points in the debate.)

After the bruising fight over pension and health reform, though, many Democrats don't have the stomach for a new battle with their union base.

The likely outcome is that tenure reform will pass, but it won't be as strong as the governor wants.

For Caffrey, the heartbreak is that some teachers regard her frank talk as treason.

"She makes it sound like the staff in Perth Amboy is ridden with unfit people running their classes," says Donna Chiera, head of the local teachers union.

For the record, Caffrey doesn't believe that. She's a former teacher herself, and she says the real misfits who simply must go make up about 1 percent of her staff. Ineffective teachers make up a larger portion, she says, perhaps 10 percent. But many of them can be improved with training.

"My favorite thing to do is to develop teachers," she says. "I love that. There is nothing better, except teaching a child to read."

What Caffrey says out loud, many other teachers and administrators whisper in private, to avoid making waves. But some of them are calling Caffrey and cheering her on.

"I want to stress that there is no school district that doesn't have these stories," she says. "Anyone who tells you differently is lying. I just have more trouble keeping my mouth shut."

And for that, anyone interested in improving the public schools should be grateful.

## BATTLE LINES

*A look at five key flash points in the tenure debate.*

### 1. Gaining tenure

Currently, teachers are entitled to tenure after three years unless the school district does not renew their contract. The governor would end that entitlement, granting tenure only after three years of positive evaluations. Sen. Teresa Ruiz (D-Essex), the Senate Education Committee chairwoman, would impose similar requirements. All sides are likely to agree to stretch the term to four years.

## 2. Losing tenure

All sides agree the process is broken, that it takes too long, costs too much and does not effectively root out bad teachers. The governor would establish an expedited process to remove tenure for teachers who are rated “ ineffective” for one year or “ partially” effective for two. Under Ruiz’ s plan, teachers could lose tenure after two years as “ ineffective.”

The NJEA says teachers deemed ineffective should have at least 90 days to improve their performance. If the district remains unsatisfied, it can seek to fire the employee through a new binding arbitration process.

## 3. Use of tests

Test results are typically not a component of teacher evaluations today. The governor would base teacher evaluations half on classroom observations and half on evidence of student learning. That evidence would include progress on standardized tests in math, science and language arts in grades 4-8. But because most teachers work in subject areas without standardized tests, such as art and social studies, evaluators would look to other evidence of student achievement — e.g., work portfolios.

Ruiz would require “ multiple measures of student achievement,” but would allow the Department of Education to specify them. The New Jersey Education Association supports unspecified use of test results, but is resisting the governor’ s plan.

## 4. Seniority

Under current law, districts facing layoffs must let go the least senior teachers, even if they are more effective than older teachers. The governor would base layoffs primarily on teacher effectiveness, not seniority. Ruiz would allow teachers who currently have tenure to retain seniority protections, but would shift to the governor’ s approach for all new hires. The NJEA opposes this change.

## 5. Mutual consent

Under current law, principals and teachers must accept assignments made by district offices. The governor wants to give either party the right to refuse that placement, as does Ruiz. Teachers who cannot find acceptance at any school could lose their jobs after one year of paid leave. The NJEA opposes this.

— The Star-Ledger

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# Minnesota: Lakeville, schools betting on digital emphasis in classrooms

Twin Cities Press

By: Christopher Magan

December 3, 2011

[http://www.twincities.com/localnews/ci\\_19459483](http://www.twincities.com/localnews/ci_19459483)

If David Mattia has a question about a lesson in his Advanced Placement chemistry class at Lakeville South High School, he has a choice: He can ask his teacher or he can turn on his laptop or smartphone and ask the "cloud."

Mattia is part of a Lakeville schools pilot program that uses the Internet to integrate computer technology into the classroom. Mattia's teacher Jason Just puts all lectures, homework and course information online where it is accessible to his class anywhere, any time.

Students bring their own digital devices to school and are online throughout class. This allows them to research concepts and answers and collaborate with each other at their own pace.

"It is just more efficient," said Mattia, a junior.

Just's chemistry class is the beginning of a digital transition newly hired Superintendent Lisa Snyder hopes to spread to the rest of the district's 11,000 students. She presented a plan to board members Nov. 22 calling for a deep commitment to blending technology and learning.

More details, including cost projections and a timeline for implementation, are expected later month.

By January, Snyder hopes to begin the first step, a \$500,000 initiative to install or improve wireless Internet access in all the district's buildings.

For Snyder, an educator who said she has long been convinced of the power of technology to improve learning, the transition is essential. It is one of the main reasons the Lakeville board members hired her, she said.

"We cannot rely on a child's casual use of technology to carry through. They need to understand how they will need it in college, the workplace and the rest of their lives," Snyder said. "I want it to be a tool in hand, accessible, so it is conducive to learning and the way our brains work. Creating is the best way to learn."

Districts across the Twin Cities, from South St. Paul to Stillwater, are embracing technology - notably tablet computers, laptops and smartphones - like never before. They do so even after an abundance of past research, including a 2007 study by the U.S. Department of Education, found that technology doesn't translate into better test scores in core subjects such as reading and math.

But using software and computers doesn't hurt scores either, the research shows, and educators say they are embracing technology in the classroom because it is already such a large part of their students' lives.

"We might as well catch them on their own terms," said James Pellegrino, a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who directs the school's Learning Science Research Institute. "These are powerful learning tools. There can be very effective uses of technology."

But it is key to see technology as a tool, not a cure-all, Pellegrino said.

"The reality is we live in a digital world," he said. "Rather than trying to prevent that at school, we need to make it seem relative."

Many educators, including Snyder, believe using technology will translate into better student achievement because the newest devices and applications allow for more personalized instruction that can reach both struggling and accelerated students. She points to new research involving iPads in Chicago Public Schools that show positive results in both test scores and student engagement.

More than 1,700 students and 50 teachers in Chicago used the iPads, and the response was overwhelmingly positive, the study found. Test scores also rose, in some cases by as much as 29 percent, but the results were anecdotal and not based on a scientific method using control groups, the district's education technology office reported.

Twin Cities educators say they have enough evidence from their own students that proves embracing technology is worthwhile. In Lakeville, Just has "flipped" his chemistry class, a technique being popularized in high-tech classrooms across the country.

Under the "flipped" learning model, lectures are posted as videos and put online for students to watch and take notes at home. When they come to class, what once was homework becomes the basis for instruction and collaboration between students.

This "blended learning," allows students to approach a topic in a hands-on, problem-solving environment, Just said. They can set their own pace and they have an abundance of online resources at their fingertips.

"This allows us to use time more efficiently," he said. "They are learning to use tools to learn."

While a handful of students in Lakeville are using their own devices in class, providing technology to students is costly and administrators say they must be careful to provide equal access to all students. Snyder and board members are still working out how much her technology initiative will cost, but one thing is clear - eventually the community will have to agree to support it financially.

A levy request is down the road, Snyder said, and in the meantime district officials want to give parents a reason to vote for it when the time comes. "We want the community to say, 'We want to pass this because we support it,'" she said.

Winning over voters can be tough, given the times.

Districts have had mixed success convincing taxpayers of the need for more technology in the classroom. George Dierberger, board chair in Stillwater, where a recent technology levy failed, said school officials are beginning to realize Internet access is the most important thing.

"Don't fall in love with the boxes and wires, because the boxes and wires change," Dierberger said. "The need to provide the boxes and wires is diminished, but the need for access is growing."

More than half of Stillwater's students now bring their own devices to school each day, and "flipped" classroom instruction is becoming more common. The challenges are keeping up with network capacity and putting technology in the hands of low-income students who don't have it at home.

"We want all our kids to be able to compete in the 21st century," Dierberger said.

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