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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 01/26/12

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### Obama Wades Into Issue of Raising Dropout Age

New York Times  
By: Tamar Lewin  
January 25, 2012

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/education/obama-wades-into-issue-of-raising-dropout-age.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/26/education/obama-wades-into-issue-of-raising-dropout-age.html?_r=1)

[President Obama](#)'s State of the Union call for every state to require students to stay in school until they turn 18 is Washington's first direct involvement in an issue that many governors and state legislators have found tough to address.

While state legislative efforts to raise the dropout age to 18 have spread in recent years, many have had trouble winning passage. Last year, for example, such legislation was considered in Alaska, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland and Rhode Island — but only Rhode Island actually changed its law.

"Efforts to raise the age usually come up against the argument that requiring students to stay in school when they no longer want to be there is disruptive to other students and not fair to the teacher," said Sunny Deye, a senior policy analyst at the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#). "Home-school groups often oppose raising the compulsory attendance age, and especially now, in this budget crunch, there are major concerns about the fiscal impact."

In Kentucky, where the dropout age of 16 was set in 1934, legislation to move the age to 18 has failed twice. Gov. Steven L. Beshear's State of the State message this month made another push.

The dropout age, historically set at 16 in most of the nation, has been edging up. Currently, 21 states and the District of Columbia have compulsory attendance until 18, and 11 others require attendance until age 17.

Given that Washington provides only about 10 percent of education financing, the federal government's effort to dictate policy in an area that has always been left to the states may raise hackles.

"I will concede that having the federal government decree this, that's going to stick hard with some people," said Bob Wise, president of the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#), which supports the proposal. "But with almost a third of our students dropping out of high school, we have an economic crisis and we need to be sending a stronger message about the importance of education."

And, he said, it would not be hard for the federal government to incentivize the higher age requirement by making it a condition of states' getting Race to the Top grants or other federal education money.

Several economists, over two decades, have found that higher dropout ages improve not only graduation rates but entrance to

higher education and career outcomes. "The evidence is quite robust that raising the school-leaving age increases educational attainment," said Philip Oreopoulos, an economics professor at the University of Toronto, whose study found, however, that exceptions to the law, lenience in enforcement and weak consequences for truancy could all interfere with an increase. "Ideally, you use both a carrot and stick approach, so that if students have to stay in school longer you're also providing wider curriculum options that might interest them."

In a 2010 report on the dropout problem, Robert Balfanz, a research scientist at Johns Hopkins University, found that of the six states that increased the compulsory school age from 2002 to 2008, two — Illinois and South Dakota — experienced increases in their graduation rates, and one, Nevada, had a decline.

"It's symbolically and strategically important to raise the age to 18, but it's not the magical thing that in itself will keep kids in school," Dr. Balfanz said.

Most policy experts warn that to prevent dropouts, schools need a broad range of supports for struggling students, as far back as the middle grades.

"There's a whole array of reasons students drop out: teen pregnancy, financial obligations, detachment from the school environment, boredom, feeling the curriculum has no relevance in the real world," said Jennifer Dounay Zinth, a senior policy analyst at the [Education Commission of the States](#). "Schools need to intervene quickly if there are warning flags."

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## Some States Prodding Students to Graduate Early

Education Week

By: Caralee J. Adams

January 25, 2012

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/25/18graduation\\_ep.h31.html?tkn=WZXFTwYRTri0Cnj5ukyWAWn726E9Kid5%2F%2BJk&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/25/18graduation_ep.h31.html?tkn=WZXFTwYRTri0Cnj5ukyWAWn726E9Kid5%2F%2BJk&cmp=clp-edweek)

To give students an incentive to work hard—and save education dollars along the way—some states are encouraging early high school graduation by ramping up curricula or giving college scholarships.

The policies emphasize proficiency over seat time. By giving students the green light to move on if they are ready, the hope is to bypass a senior slump, save families tuition money, and curb districts' instructional costs.

While a few states have rewarded early finishers for years, the concept is gaining momentum. New scholarship programs for early high school graduates are being rolled out in Idaho, Indiana, Minnesota, and South Dakota, and legislation is pending in other states.

Still, the model can face opposition when state money to districts walks with the departing students. And others are skeptical that students can be truly ready for college a semester or two early. With a growing emphasis on individual and online learning, as well as continued budget pressures, experts anticipate that the option of graduating early will continue to be debated in statehouses in the new legislative sessions.

"Requiring kids to be in school for 13 years is so 19th century," said Daniel A. Domenech, the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, in Alexandria, Va. "Here we are in the 21st century, and we can have the ability to provide for the needs of kids on an individual basis. We should track kids by their ability to progress." Pushback from districts concerned about losing money should not be a barrier to change, he said. "The goal should be about what's best for the child; everything else follows."

Many of the proposals being debated are fiscally driven, without much thought of unintended consequences of early graduation, says Diane Ward, who directs state education policy at Jobs for the Future, a national nonprofit group based in Boston. Often, those programs do not adequately serve low-income and underrepresented students, and some lack clear requirements for college and career readiness, Ms. Ward [found](#), along with fellow researcher Joel Vargas, the organization's vice president. "Just knocking off a year of high school, without proper preparation and support, can do more harm than good," Mr. Vargas said. The pair suggest states provide incentives to districts to accelerate learning for underserved populations in college-preparation programs, adopt clear college-readiness benchmarks so students leave when they are ready, and use the opportunity to be transparent about the level of achievement that high school students need to obtain.

The Education Commission of the States estimates that 23 states allow early high school graduation, but just a handful provide an incentive. The ECS [examined](#) whether students graduating early were held to the same expectations as students taking four years to finish and found, in most cases, they were, said Jennifer Dounay Zinth, a policy analyst for the Denver-based organization. To complete the required credits in less time, students took online courses, independent study, evening or summer courses, or competency-based options to demonstrate proficiency in lieu of seat time.

### On the Fast Track

Ranshitha Devendran says she's always known she wanted to be a lawyer and made up her mind as a sophomore that she wanted to graduate after her junior year. "It's something that a lot of guidance counselors worry about—that I should try to enjoy my life and not hurry it up," said the 18-year-old, who graduated from Burriss Laboratory School last spring and is now a freshman at Ball State University. Both schools are located on the same campus in Muncie, Ind.

"The main reason to graduate early," Ms. Devendran said, "was so I could go to college early, become a lawyer more quickly, relax, and then have more time for myself."

She was one of 15 students who received \$4,000 last year from the newly established Mitch Daniels Early Graduation

Scholarship. That money, along with a discount she receives because her mother is a member of the faculty at Ball State, covered most of her first-year expenses. Had she stayed in high school her senior year, Ms. Devendran said, she would not have been challenged and would have felt she was wasting time.

In Minnesota, meanwhile, state Rep. Pat Garofalo championed the Early Graduation Achievement Act that was adopted last session. It rewards students who graduate early with \$2,500 to \$7,500 to go to college or join the armed forces.

"There is a recognition that a high school diploma is a measure of knowledge, not a certificate of attendance," said the Republican. "It motivates kids to try harder."

The fact that the program could save the state \$1 million a year since it doesn't have to pay about \$9,000 per pupil in district aid for the students involved is "icing on the cake," he said. When the bill was being debated, there was some pushback that districts would lose money when students left the system early, but Rep. Garofalo says it's a small program in a \$14 billion state education budget.

Idaho established a six-year Mastery Advancement Pilot Program in 2010 that gives students in select districts an average of \$1,500 for each semester they graduate early for tuition in a public Idaho college. In its first year, the state awarded 27 scholarships.

"The greatest motivation was to encourage students to excel in their studies and make sure there was not a senior slump," said Melissa McGrath, a spokeswoman for the Idaho education department. As an incentive for schools, about a third of the per-pupil funding is given back to the districts when a student graduates early.

Since 1995, Texas has had an Early High School Graduation Scholarship Program that gives \$500 to \$2,000 each to about 6,200 students annually. But this year, the legislature didn't fund the program, after technical changes were made to education aid formulas.

"It's a very popular program," said Dominic Chavez, the senior director of the office of external relations for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. "The legislature was inundated with angry phone calls from constituents." Many students had planned their schedules counting on the money, and it wasn't until the money dried up that it became apparent how much it meant to families, he said.

Students are eligible for six years after graduation, so if the legislature restores funding, they could benefit down the road, Mr. Chavez added.

Michael Kaprelian, the president of the Texas School Counselor Association, says students who took advantage of the early-graduation scholarship included high achievers and others who were just burned out on high school. Although the money was appealing, he often advised students to stay in school their senior year to get more classes. "I never saw the financial benefits outweighing the experience, in terms of preparation for college," Mr. Kaprelian said.

#### Lack of Interest

Other states are struggling to get the concept to catch on.

While Kentucky supports dual-credit and early-college programs, early-graduation bills have died quickly, according to Lisa Gross, a spokeswoman for the Kentucky education department.

"We are focused on ensuring all children graduate from high school college- and career-ready, and since Kentucky's graduation rate needs improvement, our resources are going to that goal," she said. "We don't actively discourage early graduation, but our primary concern is around those students who don't graduate or don't graduate on time."

Kansas state Rep. Jim Howell introduced legislation last spring to provide \$3,000 scholarships for early high school graduates, but he can't get enough support. "This is one of the elements of our Republican platform, so I thought there should at least be a bill," he said. But he alone testified at a budget committee hearing.

Many students in Mr. Howell's legislative district in the south-central part of the state say they are unchallenged as seniors, according to the lawmaker. "Why let their brain turn to mush that last year?" he said. If parents approve, he wants them to have the option of moving on.

He's heard concerns, however, that students going to college ahead of schedule would be too immature. Also, graduation requirements vary by school district in Kansas, so it's complicated to work out a uniform plan for early completion and participation incentives.

"I need the public to understand the value and get excited, and then I would introduce it again," Rep. Howell said of his proposal.

#### Tougher Curriculum

Another early-graduation model—but one that doesn't provide financial rewards—is being piloted by the National Center on Education and the Economy. Excellence for All focuses on a rigorous core curriculum for the first two years of high school. At the end of the sophomore year, students are given an exam. If they pass, they have the option of graduating early and enrolling in a community college or doing college-prep work in their junior and senior years.

"It's a program for poor performers and great performers," said Marc S. Tucker, the president of the center, based in Washington. It gives struggling students the supports during the first two years of high school so they can bypass the need for remedial education in college, he said. Many students won't pass the exam at the end of 10th grade, but the school is then obligated to customize a program so they will get help where needed to succeed the next year, said Mr. Tucker, who also writes an opinion blog for Education Week's website.

About a dozen of the pilot high schools out of 21 nationwide participating this year in Excellence for All are in Arizona, where the nonprofit Center for the Future of Arizona has been tasked with overseeing the program.

Executive Director Sybil Frances says the emphasis is on defining what "college ready" means and making college accessible for all students. "It's not an elite program," said Ms. Frances. "The reality is I don't think students will graduate in droves early. This is not an easy program." But, she added, it's appealing to many students to work at their own pace and finish early, if possible.

(In 2007, Arizona established an Early High School Graduation Scholarship for up to \$2,000, but the state's revenue shortfall led to the program's suspension in 2009.)

At the ASU Preparatory Academy in Phoenix, Principal Deborah Gonzales says students are responding to the increased rigor. The new program has been a turning point in the school culture, she said, with students becoming serious about going to college, and discipline problems decreasing.

"Our students never saw themselves as smart kids," Ms. Gonzales said. "Now, they are talking about themselves as smart and college-bound. It's a phenomenal change in the way kids perceive themselves."

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## States Anticipate Technology Challenges With Common Tests

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

January 25, 2012

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2012/01/states\\_anticipate\\_technology\\_c.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2012/01/states_anticipate_technology_c.html)

Most states that have adopted the common standards anticipate significant challenges in shifting to a computer-based assessment system designed for those standards, a new study tells us.

A survey released today by the [Center on Education Policy](#) shows that 20 states anticipate a "major challenge" rounding up enough computers so all students can take the new tests, which are expected to be fully operational in 2014-15. Another four states said they expected getting enough computers to be a "minor challenge," and nine others said they didn't anticipate a problem, or that it was too soon to tell.

States also cited adequate Internet access and bandwidth as a potential problem with the common assessments. Fifteen called it a major challenge; 10 called it a minor challenge. Eight said it wouldn't be a problem or that it was too soon to tell.

States are also worried about not having access to state-, district- or school-level expertise to help with technological problems as the tests are being given. Fourteen called this a major challenge.

The two consortia of states working on tests for the common standards are jointly designing a "technology needs assessment tool" that will help states and districts gauge their readiness for the common assessments, which are scheduled to be fully operational in 2014-15. The self-assessment should be available for use in March.

In the new survey, the CEP researchers asked states whether their decision to adopt the common standards "might change" in 2011-12. Three states answered yes. The study did not identify which states participated in the survey.

The Center on Education Policy survey also includes updated information from its survey last year on the steps states are taking to implement common standards. States overwhelmingly reported that they were creating long-term implementation plans, adopting and implementing new assessments, and revising or creating curriculum materials. (Last year's CEP study of states is [here](#), and my story about it is [here](#).)

In the new CEP state update, many also reported that they are aligning the content of teacher-preparation programs to align with the common standards, and that they are modifying teacher-evaluation or -induction programs to reflect those new expectations.

Fewer states reported aligning undergraduate admissions requirements or college curricula with the common core.

Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia responded to the CEP study, but since two of the states had not adopted the standards and one had adopted only in English/language arts, the report from the study focuses only on the responses of 35 states.

Regular readers of Curriculum Matters might recall that the CEP also studied district-level implementation of the common standards last fall, and found a pretty mixed bag. Their study is [here](#), and my story about it is [here](#).

Those of you who like to track states' progress in transitioning to the common core might also want to read about a recent study that the EPE Research Center and Education First did on that topic. See [here](#) for my story.

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## Harkin, Miller to Education Secretary: Set a High Bar for Waivers

Education Week

By Alyson Klein

January 25, 2012

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2012/01/miller\\_and\\_harkin\\_to\\_duncan\\_se.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2012/01/miller_and_harkin_to_duncan_se.html)

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, any day now, is supposed to announce which states will get waivers from parts of the No Child Left Behind Act, in exchange for embracing certain education reform priorities.

But a pair of Democratic education leaders in Congress have some concerns about aspects of the 11 state applications submitted so far, and they're urging Duncan to adhere to the very high bar he says he'll set for approval.

U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, of Iowa, the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, and U.S. Rep. George Miller, of California, sent a [letter](#) to Duncan on Jan. 17 outlining what they see as specific problems in the initial applications. The department has been working with states to make changes and tweaks to their approaches, but those discussions have not been made public.

"We felt the first round of applications didn't go far enough to maintain the strong accountability approach that was expected," a Harkin aide said. "We wanted to make sure that even though some of the first-round applications don't look like they are there yet, [the department] would work with states to reach a high bar."

The lawmakers don't name specific states, but it's clear they think there need to be big changes to nearly all the applications before they're approved.

For instance:

- At least nine of the 11 state applications would create a "super subgroup" essentially lumping together students with disabilities, English-language learners, and racial minorities, according to a [report](#) by the Center on Education Policy, a research and advocacy organization in Washington. Harkin and Miller are worried the concerns of specific subgroups could get swept under the rug in that arrangement.

- The lawmakers want to make sure states really emphasize graduation rates in their accountability systems. "Low graduation rates cannot be obscured through changes in test scores or vice-versa," they write. A [report](#) from the Alliance for Excellence in Education, in Washington, questioned whether states are really doing a good job of ensuring that graduation rates count for accountability purposes.

- Teacher evaluation is another area of concern. At least six states that applied haven't yet adopted the specifics spelled out in the waiver guidelines, according to an Education Week analysis. And a [report](#) by the Center for American Progress, in Washington, also questions whether states have the capacity to deliver on the evaluation portion of the applications.

It's notable that Harkin would have an issue with states' handling of the teacher-evaluation requirement. His own [bill](#), introduced with U.S. Sen. Michael B. Enzi, the top Republican on the education committee, doesn't call for evaluations at all, unless a district or state wants competitive grant money.

But that bill is the product of bipartisan negotiations, while the letter reflects Harkin's own priorities for reauthorization, which includes teacher evaluation for everyone, a Harkin aide explained. (Harkin's original bill did ask all districts to craft evaluations, but that language got jettisoned to garner GOP support for the measure.)

Why so much focus on this first round of waivers? The applications that get approved now will set the bar for future rounds, as states seek to copy successful strategies, a Miller aide said. And, if a bunch of states end up using similar accountability systems, that could be incorporated into a future reauthorization of the law.

Of course, the lawmakers might be assuaged by some of the changes the Education Department has already demanded states make to their waiver applications—but unfortunately, we [don't know](#) what those changes entailed. The department refuses to make public the formal feedback letters it has issued to states, which outline the department's concerns and ask for changes.

Duncan's response to the lawmakers' letter? He promises that no child will be left, well, behind:

"ESEA flexibility will allow states to target aid where its needed the most while not compromising an inch on achievement gaps," said Justin Hamilton, Duncan's spokesman, in an email. "States will have the flexibility to craft local plans for local issues, but they must address the needs of every child."

## **STATE NEWS**

### **School choice supporters converge on Georgia Capitol**

Atlanta Journal Constitution

By: Nancy Badertscher

January 25, 2011.

<http://www.ajc.com/news/georgia-government/school-choice-supporters-converge-1316868.html>

"We do not believe that a ZIP code or a family's financial status should determine a student's options," said Rashaun Holliman, a former school principal and activist with the advocacy group Center for an Educated Georgia, kicking off a rally that spilled into a street beside the Capitol just as the General Assembly was coming into session for the day.

Many in the crowd -- estimated by organizers at more than 1,500 -- wore bright yellow scarfs and makeshift mortar boards that declared their support for the school choice movement being celebrated around the country this week.

Others had placards, banners and buttons, declaring: "Charters Schools Rock" and "Supreme Court: My charter is special."

Last year, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that that the Georgia Charter Schools Commission could not, over the objection of

local school boards, approve charter schools or require that they be given local tax dollars.

On the eve of Wednesday's rally, a constitutional amendment was filed in the state House that would overrule the high court's ruling.

The amendment has both Republican and Democrat supporters. However, there's strong opposition from local school superintendents and several other school organizations as school districts fight to keep dollars for traditional schools, especially after several years of budget cuts. The amendment would require at least two-thirds approval in both the House and Senate before it could be put before voters, possibly in November.

Although the crowd included supporters of private school scholarships, home schools and online schools, the overwhelming majority came to show their support of charter schools. Some area charter schools even made it a field trip for many of their students.

John Trainor, a father of three whose children attend a charter school in Fulton County, said having a choice made a difference in his sons' educations.

"It's the only thing we can truly give our kids for the rest of their life, and it's vital that we get it right," he said. "Unlike every other political issue, school choice doesn't see politics, it doesn't see race, it doesn't see gender. All it sees is the success of our children."

Senate Majority Leader Chip Rogers, a longtime school choice supporter, told the crowd that Georgia children must be given every opportunity to obtain the best education possible.

"Education is the great equalizer," said Rogers, a Republican from Woodstock. "If you have an education, you can succeed. School choice equals freedom."

State Rep. Alisha Thomas Morgan, D-Austell, urged school choice supporters to lobby lawmakers to support the constitutional amendment.

"Real choice is not an indictment on traditional public education," she said. "Though we have had some hiccups along the way, we can't give up."

Micah Victory was among a group of students from south Cobb County's Imagine Charter School, a school that has not had its charter renewed and is facing closure at the end of the school year.

Micah's mother, Merriam Wynn, said her third-grade son needs the individual attention that the charter school setting offers.

"We feel it's the best option for him," Wynn said.

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## Florida gets B and B+ on two national education report cards (one on teacher policy, the other on reform)

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

January, 25 2012

[http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news\\_education\\_edblog/2012/01/florida-gets-b-and-b-on-two-national-education-report-cards-one-on-teacher-policy-the-other-on-reform.html?](http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2012/01/florida-gets-b-and-b-on-two-national-education-report-cards-one-on-teacher-policy-the-other-on-reform.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29)

[utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29](http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2012/01/florida-gets-b-and-b-on-two-national-education-report-cards-one-on-teacher-policy-the-other-on-reform.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29)

Catching up on some news from yesterday.....

The conservative group ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) gave Florida a B+ for its education reform policies and ranked it 12th in the nation when it came to student performance.

Florida had been 3rd on that performance ranking (which is based on improvement) but dropped because its 2011 NAEP scores were mostly flat.

The top state as far as performance was (as usual) Massachusetts and the top for policy was Missouri.

The National Council on Teacher Quality gave Florida the highest grade in the nation, a B, when it rated the states on their efforts to improve the teacher profession. The council wants states to improve how they train teachers, how they retain good ones and how they weed out ineffective ones.

The group said Florida was a "trailblazer" for its new merit-pay law that overhauls how teachers are to be evaluated, paid and promoted. But it said the state must do more to "ensure the quality of teachers entering the profession."

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## Idaho Senate Passes Bill On Teacher Evaluations

Associated Press

By: Staff  
January 25, 2012  
<http://www.localnews8.com/politics/30297934/detail.html>

BOISE, Idaho -- Lawmakers in the Idaho Senate have approved legislation to clarify when parents can start weighing in on teaching evaluations.

The bill cleared the chamber Wednesday on a unanimous vote. It is among a series of tweaks being considered by lawmakers working to refine a massive education overhaul that was signed into law last year, with backing from public schools chief Tom Luna.

The plan says at least 50 percent of a teacher's job evaluation will be based on student achievement starting July 1, and parental input will also be a factor. Republican Sen. John Goedde of Coeur d'Alene says to some school districts, the law was unclear as to when parents become involved.

Legislation now headed to the Idaho House clarifies that parental input also comes into play July 1.

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## Missouri bill allows quicker intervention in schools

Associated Press

By: Staff

January 25, 2012

[http://www.stltoday.com/news/state-and-regional/missouri/mo-bill-allows-quicker-intervention-in-schools/article\\_9b1e8fdf-4497-5f9a-aaea-157c6d180882.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/state-and-regional/missouri/mo-bill-allows-quicker-intervention-in-schools/article_9b1e8fdf-4497-5f9a-aaea-157c6d180882.html)

State education officials could set a timeline for intervening in failing Missouri school districts instead of waiting for a two-year grace period under legislation considered Wednesday by a House education committee.

The push to allow quicker state involvement in districts comes shortly after Kansas City schools lost state accreditation. One area that could be particularly affected is Kansas City, which currently has through June 2014 to improve before facing a state takeover. Two other Missouri school districts also are unaccredited \_ St. Louis Public Schools and the Riverview Gardens School District in St. Louis County \_ but each lost accreditation in 2007.

Waiting a couple years before allowing direct state intervention is too long for some state lawmakers. Sponsoring Rep. Mike Lair, who had been a teacher, said students entering high school in Kansas City would be juniors before state officials could act and might graduate before meaningful changes take root.

"If you find a man lying in the street, you don't say I'll be back in six hours to help you," said Lair, R-Chillicothe.

Legislation presented to the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee would allow the State Board of Education to set a schedule for state involvement and approve an alternative system for governing unaccredited school districts. State officials could set a way for existing local school boards to continue operating their districts.

Alternatives developed by state officials would need to include the rationale for that choice and a system for accepting public comment. Expectations would need to be set for boosting academic performance, including a goal for when the schools would regain state accreditation. The state Board of Education would need to review and certify the alternative oversight structure every three years for districts that have not yet regained accreditation. The Legislature and governor would receive annual reports about districts' progress.

Current law allows state education officials to appoint a special administrative board to govern unaccredited districts, merge them with a nearby district or split unaccredited districts into several new school systems. Those options remain under the legislation.

Missouri Education Commissioner Chris Nicastro, who previously has urged the Legislature to consider eliminating the two-year wait, supported the legislation Wednesday. She said current law does not provide flexibility to deal with the specific needs of individual districts and that the two-year waiting period is wrong.

"For us to sit back and allow a system that has proven to be dysfunctional for literally decades to wait for two more years before we are able to provide more direct support and intervention is in fact unconscionable," Nicastro said.

Several school superintendents, a teachers union and the Missouri School Boards' Association also backed the legislation. No one publicly opposed the measure during the House hearing.

The legislation does not delve into specifics for unaccredited school districts should be governed. Different proposals have been suggested this year for how to handle Kansas City's schools, including an idea from Kansas City Mayor Sly James that would permit mayoral control.

Rep. Jason Holsman, whose legislative district includes three school districts that could receive students transferring from Kansas City, said delaying state action is not productive. He said there seems to be agreement quick action is needed but consensus has not yet been reached about what to do.

"The quickest path to regain student achievement is always preferable," said Holsman, D-Kansas City. "If removing this two-year requirement will spur action either legislatively or from (the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education), then someone better have a pretty darn good reason as to why we should wait."

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