

**From:** [Clare Crowson \(Clare@floridapromise.org\)](mailto:Clare@floridapromise.org) <[ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com](mailto:ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com)>

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## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/25/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Arne Duncan: We Will Not Prescribe a National Curriculum**

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

May 24, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/05/arne\\_duncan\\_on\\_national\\_curric.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/05/arne_duncan_on_national_curric.html)

We've been telling you a good deal lately about the arguments over the role of the federal government in promoting common standards and in funding the development of curriculum and assessments for those standards. (If you've been napping, see [here](#) for a refresher.)

Until now, we've had only occasional words on this from federal officials (see U.S. Ed Department spokesman Peter Cunningham's [comments](#) last week). Most of the volleying on the federalism issue has come from advocates and policy wonks. Today, however, we've got weigh-ins from Rep. John Kline, the chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, and from Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

Kline's comments came during an appearance today on Bill Bennett's radio show, as my colleague [Alyson Klein reports over at Politics K-12](#). During the 13-minute [interview](#), the Minnesota Republican said he thought the federal government was using its Race to the Top program to "push" a "national curriculum." (RTT, you remember, gave states points for adopting the common standards and is also providing funding for state consortia to develop tests and curriculum materials for those standards.)

"My concern is if you look at what the administration is doing with Race to the Top and so forth, on the one hand they will say they want this bottom up, and yet it's all stick and carrot with Race to the Top," Kline said.

"You do what the secretary thinks is a good thing to do and you get rewarded, and if you don't, you get punished. ... That's the line we're talking about, where you get the federal government starting to push a national curriculum, or insisting on one, and as you know, that's been against the law, and I think correctly so. We don't want the secretary of education to decide what the curriculum is in every school in America..."

Duncan weighed in on the topic this morning as well. At a [forum](#) hosted by the National Center on Education and the Economy, Duncan was discussing lessons that can be learned from higher-performing countries, and he mentioned national standards and curriculum. But he said: "We have not and will not prescribe a national curriculum. I want to repeat that." This remark prompted laughter from the audience, my colleague Stephen Sawchuk, who attended the forum, reports. Duncan also said it would be against the law to prescribe national curriculum. (A webcast of the symposium is [here](#).)

How, might you ask, could this debate affect the holding-together of the common-core movement? Good question. Worth watching.

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# A Times Derby: Gates, Parents, Rhee, and, of course, “Beyond Tests” with Michael Winerip

Education Next

By: Peter Meyer

May 24, 2011

<http://educationnext.org/a-times-derby-gates-parents-rhee-and-of-course-beyond-tests-with-michael-winerip/>

The New York *Times* has had a veritable flock of noteworthy education stories the last several days and, at the risk of bursting readers' 20 article bubble, I would recommend all five.

[Behind Grass-Roots School Advocacy, Bill Gates](#) That's the headline over the front-page story in my Early Edition Sunday *Times* and I was looking forward to some juicy tidbits about the billionaire secretly funding a Bill Ayers power-to-the-people project. In fact, Ayers is not mentioned, but just about everyone else in the education world is, including our own Checker Finn. But Harvard? Grass-roots? Randi Weingarten? Jack Jennings? Rick Hess? The most interesting part of the story is that the Gates Foundation “new strategy,” as Sam Dillon writes, is to “overhaul... the nation's education policies.” He quotes Allan Golston, president of the foundation's United States program: “We've learned that school-level investments aren't enough to drive system changes... The importance of advocacy has gotten clearer and clearer.”

[Strange Bedfellows](#) Dillon calls it a “strange-bedfellows twist,” and his story describes how Michelle Rhee, former D.C. superintendent, has hired George Parker, former head of the district's teachers union, as a part time senior fellow at her new advocacy organization *Students First*. Dillon writes that Parker “says Ms. Rhee hates teachers' unions less than most people think.” Now he tells us!

[The Math of Heartbreak](#) If they hand out Pulitzers for headlines, this would qualify. Writer Michael Sokolove tells a touching story of a working-class Pennsylvania school district's attempts to come to terms with its financial challenges. “Everything that is going to be presented tonight is not good for our kids,” the superintendent told his school board and a room full of teachers, parents and students. “We are heartbroken.” Unlike his colleague Michael Winerip (see next item), Sokolove doesn't seem bent on scoring political points here, as he describes how Bristol Township is facing its \$10 million deficit (in a \$123 million budget) “much like a couple talking around their kitchen table with a stack of bills, no hope of paying them and nothing but bad options.”

[Teaching Beyond the Test](#) As much as I try to give Michael Winerip the benefit of the doubt (see [here](#)), he seems intent on delivering a message with his reporting – nothing wrong with that except that the message gets in the way of the facts. In this case, a story about a 25-year veteran teacher's admirable efforts to teach his U.S. History AP students about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is littered with pat phrases intended to score points against education reformers. (Intention is always a hard nut to crack, but Winerip's asides are so whacky that they can't be attributed to accident.) He says, for instance, that the teacher, Chris Doyle, used to teach current events, but “standardized testing and canned curriculums have squeezed most of that out of public education.” Oh yah? He doesn't even have his veteran teacher saying such a thing. In fact, Doyle, whose class sounds terrific (despite Winerip's sappy attempt at making Doyle into a rebel by having him do “what teachers did in the olden days: creates his own curriculum”), and who worries most about why the scores in his AP classes vary so much (from 50—85 percent) from year to year. Could it be because the school doesn't have a good, consistent curriculum? Could it be that the teachers the kids have in earlier grades are not so hot? Instead of digging into that, of course, Winerip jumps to the predictable conclusion that “evaluating teachers based on their students test scores may not be foolproof.” Please Mr. Winerip, just the facts.

[Punishing Parents](#) This is an interesting take on the elusive parental involvement monster. As writer Lisa Belkin says, “teachers are fed up with being blamed for the failures of American education, and legislators are starting to hear them.” She discusses several states' efforts to fix education with “parent-participation” laws. Belkin unfortunately succumbs to the frying-pan-into-the-fire problem by quoting Diane Ravitch criticizing the “punish the parents” laws and suggesting that “the root problem is poverty.” Will someone correct me, but weren't public schools created to make up for bad parenting skills and poverty by teaching kids to be better and smarter than their parents? How did we get to the point where we now can't teach kids unless we first fix their parents and make them middle class?

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## States: Stimulus Aid Sparked Progress on Goals

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

May 25, 2011

[HTTP://WWW.EDWEEK.ORG/EW/ARTICLES/2011/05/25/32SFSE.H30.HTML?TKN=PUZFMJEX%2F6SCGYF3IJFP75I30DNY1NPPVEUT&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/05/25/32SFSE.H30.HTML?TKN=PUZFMJEX%2F6SCGYF3IJFP75I30DNY1NPPVEUT&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK)

After spending \$44 billion in one-time federal education aid to shore up sagging budgets during the recent recession, states report they've made progress in improving school data systems and more equitably distributing highly qualified teachers across all schools.

But big questions remain about their overall progress on key education improvement priorities mandated under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic-stimulus package approved by Congress in 2009.

The ARRA poured nearly \$100 billion into education overall. The largest single pool—the \$48.6 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund—required states to show improvements in four specific areas: low-performing schools, data systems, teacher

effectiveness, and standards and assessments.

According to the [first annual reports](#) filed by states to account for spending under the stabilization fund:

- Thirteen states, including Florida, New Mexico, and Wyoming, said that their longitudinal-data systems feature all 12 elements that are outlined in the America competes Act, a broad federal law focused on strengthening the nation's economic competitiveness and used as a yardstick for ARRA progress. They include the ability to track students from preschool through college, match individual teachers to students and their data, and monitor student-level transcript information such as grades earned and courses completed.
- Four states—Connecticut, Nebraska, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin—have data systems that meet fewer than half the criteria.
- All states, in one way or another, have declared they've made progress on or have solved the challenge of equitably distributing highly qualified teachers across all schools, including schools that primarily serve poor and minority students.
- Seventeen states, including Arizona, Kentucky, and Minnesota, answered "no" to the question of whether they've analyzed the appropriateness and effectiveness of testing accommodations offered to English-language learners and special education students.

### *Salaries, Benefits*

Together, school districts reported spending 70 percent of their share of stabilization fund dollars in fiscal year 2010 on salaries and benefits.

Twenty percent of their stabilization fund money was spent on what the reports label "other" uses—a broad category that represented spending on everything from online formative assessments and computer monitors in Connecticut to textbooks and utility bills in Nebraska. (The remaining stabilization fund dollars were either carried over to fiscal 2011 or were spent on school construction or repairs.)

Linking the bulk of that spending to specific education improvements could be a stretch, however.

"It would be like if someone gave you a gift of \$1,000 and then turned around a year or two years later and said, 'What did you spend the \$1,000 on? I hope it was educational stuff,'" said Michael Griffith, a fiscal analyst with the Denver-based Education Commission of the States. "What happens is the money was blended in with the rest of your money."

The fiscal-stabilization fund gave states great flexibility in spending the money to help stay afloat during the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. States and districts didn't necessarily have to spend their money on specific purposes, but they did have to agree, in general, to make progress in the four improvement areas as a condition of receiving the money. In fact, when the second and final batch of stabilization money was released, states were required to outline how they planned to make progress in those four "assurances."

The first annual reports, made public late last month, represent \$43.9 billion in spending and offer early details on how states are doing regarding data systems and equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers among schools with large numbers of disadvantaged students. More detailed information will be out in June and September as states complete more reports.

While some questions were cut and dried—such as whether a state's data system meets certain criteria—other questions were more descriptive. For example, states were asked to outline their progress in reducing inequities in the distribution of "highly qualified teachers," which most education policy experts agree is a fairly low standard created under the No Child Left Behind Act that seeks to get certified teachers into classrooms.

Some states offered far more lengthy answers than others. Kansas, for example, gave a long explanation of how it is improving teacher effectiveness overall, especially in high-poverty schools, detailing specific goals set and progress made. The state is working on collecting better data about teacher transfers, assignment, and distribution. Through that step, Kansas officials discovered problems around an inequitable distribution of math teachers in high-poverty schools.

Vermont, on the flip side, declared "there are no inequities in the distribution" of highly qualified teachers across its poor and minority populations.

From the U.S. Department of Education's standpoint, any answer was acceptable. "The main purpose of this question is to make [our] monitoring transparent and public," said spokeswoman Liz Utrup.

But to some education advocates, the reports reveal little on the teacher-equity front, since Education Department data show that nearly 100 percent of teachers already are highly qualified under the NCLB law.

"We didn't learn anything, because we didn't ask states to do anything," said Amy Wilkins, the vice president of government affairs and communications at the Washington-based Education Trust, which advocates educational improvement for disadvantaged students. "We rained money down on their hands and asked them for nothing."

### *Other Engines*

The Education Department points to other stimulus-funded programs, namely the \$4 billion Race to the Top grant initiative, as the real driver of education change. Ms. Utrup cited the 28 states that have enacted laws to improve teacher quality, and the 16 states that have changed laws to increase their ability to intervene in low-performing schools, all in an effort to buff up their Race to the Top applications. That competition, which ended last year with 12 winners, also rewarded states for proposals in areas such as improving data systems.

For Aimee Guidera, the executive director of the Data Quality Campaign, including data systems as one of four key reform areas was far more valuable than any money states might have spent on actual building their systems.

"I would argue that it was more the exposure and the priority that the data issue was given," said Ms. Guidera, whose Washington-based group tracks and promotes the use of data to shape policymaking and instruction. "States were well on their way to putting into place these systems, but by having these assurances and commitments, it really added extra fuel."

Having a data to-do list for states is only the beginning, she said.

"It's valuable information, but so what?" Ms. Guidera said. "The real value comes with 'So, what are we doing with this data?'"

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **Thousands of Broward teachers protest job cuts and demand raises**

Sun Sentinel

By: Cara Fitzpatrick

May 25, 2011

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/education/fl-broward-teachers-protest-20110525.0.3314922.story>

FORT LAUDERDALE – Ringing bells, carrying signs and shouting slogans like "Yes, we can," teachers clogged the sidewalks Tuesday around the Broward School District headquarters to protest job cuts, district mismanagement and a lack of raises.

The Broward Teachers Union even hired two planes to fly overhead with signs that read, "Broward School Board Cut Waste Not Jobs" and "Superintendent Notter Resignation: 37 Days to Go."

Union officials estimated that about 2,500 teachers showed up for the protest, which they dubbed the "Fight for our Future." About 1,100 teachers arrived on buses chartered by the union. Both buses and planes were paid for by one of the national teachers unions, officials said.

Pat Santeramo, president of the teachers union, said the huge turnout demonstrates the frustration of "all public employees." He criticized the state Legislature for cutting school funding and forcing public employees to contribute 3 percent to their pensions.

He also said the district was at fault for "mismanaging" its money and failing to find raises for teachers. The district is at impasse with the union in salary negotiations.

"We've got an administration and a School Board that doesn't care," he said.

Superintendent Jim Notter and board members were wrapping up their meeting as the protest got under way. Ringing bells could be heard inside the building.

Notter said the board hasn't finished looking at its budget.

"We're doing everything we can to look everywhere we can for dollars," he said.

The school district sent pink slips to about 1,400 teachers last week, cutting teachers who are in the first or second year of their contract. About half of the affected teachers knew their jobs were for one year only.

Christina Taylor, a fourth-grade teacher at Discovery Elementary in Sunrise, said she doesn't think the district has tried hard enough to find cuts outside the schools.

"This is ridiculous. We don't have paper to make copies for the kids," she said.

Teachers were joined at the protest by supporters from the community and other district unions.

State Sen. [Eleanor Sobel](#), D-Hollywood, said she came out because she's concerned about job cuts in [Broward County](#). She also blamed the Republican-dominated Legislature for cutting school funding.

"We didn't do our job either in Tallahassee," she said.

The Rev. Simon Osunlana, of St. John United Methodist Church in [Fort Lauderdale](#), said he joined the protest to support teachers. He said he feared that families would be hurt after 1,400 teachers lose their jobs in June.

"It is absolutely inhumane to lay off 1,400 teachers in this economy," he said.

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### **Deadline arrives for education chief applicants**

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

May 24, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-education-commissioner-search-20110524.0.7662023.story>

The national search for Florida's next education commissioner has yielded three applicants so far, but several more are expected before the deadline Wednesday.

The pool of candidates likely will include at least one or two who aren't career educators, fitting with Gov. Rick Scott's promise for a "new era for education in Florida."

Florida's search overlaps with several other states' searches, potentially limiting its pool of candidates. But its reputation for reform and improved academics are a likely plus, at least to those with like-minded education ideas.

"We are competing against some other states, which is a challenge for us and our advisers. However, I'm pretty happy with the names mentioned during my last briefing ....and our chances look good," said John Padgett, a member of the State Board of Education, in an email.

The State Board, appointed by the governor, hires Florida's education commissioner. It set Wednesday as the deadline for applications from those who want to oversee the state's public schools and colleges. Education Commissioner Eric Smith steps down June 10.

Many new governors were elected in November, prompting the search for new state education chiefs, said Daniel Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators.

Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland and New York just finished, or are still searching for new school leaders.

Still, Domenech said, "I think Florida should have a good candidate's pool to draw from."

But state school chief jobs aren't easy to fill, he said, requiring someone up for the challenge of navigating the worlds of school policy and state politics.

"Eric Smith was a very competent, capable educator" who'd won praise nationally and "seemed to have been a good appointment in Florida," said Domenech, who first met Smith when both were superintendents in Virginia.

But Smith announced his resignation in March, in part because he was unable to establish a relationship with the new governor. The announcement prompted the immediate resignation of board chairman T. Willard Fair, who said Scott was "dismissive" of the board and did not recognize Smith's accomplishments.

The board hired the firm of Ray and Associates to help recruit commissioner candidates. The company has provided the names of three applicants with completed applications, but little other information publicly. It has briefed board members privately, however. Firm officials did not return phone calls.

At the State Board meeting last week, a firm official said some top candidates likely would not file paperwork until the May 25 deadline, to avoid public disclosure required under Florida law any earlier than needed.

The search four years ago was more public, with candidates' applications posted to a website. That search yielded 27 candidates, including Smith, who had been a superintendent in three states and was working for the College Board. He earned effusive praise from board members at his final board meeting last week.

The three applicants identified so far are: Thomas Goodman, a former school superintendent in La Jolla, CA; Bessie Karvelas, a school administrator in Chicago; and Carlos Lopez, superintendent of the River Rouge school district in Michigan.

The firm has identified maybe a dozen candidates who would be ideal for Florida and expects to have about six to present to the board, said Bill Adams, a regional search director.

Smith, hired in 2007, was the state's first commissioner selected after a national search. Previous commissioners had been elected and then, after a switch to an appointed commissioner, tapped for the job.

Though Florida would likely recruit some non-traditional candidates, Domenech said such people may not be attracted to state posts and their comparatively low pay.

Florida is offering a negotiable salary in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range, considerably less chief executives make in the private sector and even less than many district school superintendents earn.

The board plans to meet June 1 in Tampa to interview candidates.

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Alabama House Panel Approves Teacher Tenure Revision**

Associated Press

By: Staff

May 24, 2011

[http://www.wtvj.com/home/headlines/Ala\\_House\\_Panel\\_Approves\\_Teacher\\_Tenure\\_Revision\\_122520239.html](http://www.wtvj.com/home/headlines/Ala_House_Panel_Approves_Teacher_Tenure_Revision_122520239.html)

*Bill would streamline the process school boards use to fire teachers.*

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) -- A key plank in the agenda of the Alabama Legislature's new Republican majority, reforming tenure laws for

public school teachers, has passed an Alabama House committee and moved within one step of final passage.

The bill would streamline the process school boards use to fire teachers.

In the current system, federal arbitrators hear appeals of teacher dismissals.

The bill that passed the House Ways and Means-Education Committee on a 9-5 vote Tuesday calls for retired state judges to hear the appeals.

The bill has already passed the Senate.

The committee vote puts it in position for final approval in the House Wednesday.

Opponents, mostly Democrats, say it slants the dismissal process against teachers and is filled with flaws that will have to eventually be settled in court.

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## Improvement in Orleans test scores touted

Associated Press

By: Kevein McGill

May 24, 2011

<http://www.dailycomet.com/article/20110524/APN/1105240605?Title=Standardized-test-scores-to-be-released&tc=ar>

The percentage of Louisiana public school students who have demonstrated readiness to move to the next grade level edged up again this year, according to state Department of Education results for spring standardized tests released Tuesday.

State education officials say betterment in most subjects and grade levels and in 42 of the state's 70 school districts is proof that improvement efforts instituted over the last decade are working. Sixty-six percent of students were ready to move up, compared with 65 percent last year.

"These results validate that the reforms and initiatives being implemented are paying off for our students - in this case several thousand more children are better-prepared to succeed in their future academic and life pursuits," acting State Superintendent of Education Ollie Tyler said in a statement after the figures were released in Baton Rouge.

The news was not uniformly positive. Sixty-six percent of students achieving the basic level in all grades and subjects marks a 7 percentage point improvement over the last six years but still means roughly a third of students haven't achieved that level.

Officials were able to point to improvements in urban areas such as New Orleans and in rural regions, such as East Carroll Parish. The northeastern Louisiana district with only 1,300 students showed an 8 percent jump - the highest in the state - in the number of students scoring at the "basic" level. That is defined by the state as demonstrating fundamental knowledge and skills needed to move to the next grade level.

New Orleans schools mostly overseen by the state's Recovery School District, which took over after Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, showed the second-highest improvement at 5 percent. The RSD runs 23 schools itself and turned 46 over to independent charter organizations.

RSD also runs a few schools in other districts - Caddo, East Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee and St. Helena - and that group showed a 4 percent gain in students achieving basic level, tied with Red River Parish for the third most improved.

There were areas of decline. For instance, the percentage of high school students achieving basic or better on the graduate exit exam declined over the year, from 65 percent to 60 percent. (The subset achieving the higher "advanced" or "mastery" levels also slipped from 17 percent to 13 percent.)

Graduate exit math percentages also declined from 73 percent at basic to 69 percent. There were percentage declines in various subjects and at various grade levels for the iLeap test takers.

The biggest percentage-point decline was for 10th grade test takers, with a 5 percent drop in English language arts and 4 percent in math, the department said.

In New Orleans, the Recovery School District's new superintendent, John White, cited various areas of improvement as he held a news conference at a charter school in eastern New Orleans, an area ravaged by the widespread flooding that followed Katrina. The inundation of 80 percent of the city after levee breaches during the storm led to the RSD taking over most schools from the long-troubled Orleans Parish Schools system.

Among the improvements for New Orleans' RSD schools noted: The percentage of fourth-graders meeting promotion standards in the state's LEAP promotion tests (a combination of "basic" and "approaching basic" scores on different subjects) grew from 58 percent last year to 64 percent this year. Eighth grade rates improved from 50 percent last year to 60 percent. The

percentage of fourth-graders achieving an overall "basic" score leveled off at 53 percent, same as last year, but eighth-grade "basic" scores jumped from 37 percent last year to 50 percent this year.

And the percentage of eighth-graders in the New Orleans RSD schools achieving basic level increased in all four LEAP test subjects - English, math, science and social studies. "Double-digit gains in every content area," said RSD Deputy Superintendent Patrick Dobard. "That is just phenomenal."

Overall, the number of RSD students achieving basic level or above has more than doubled over the last four years.

The Zachary Community School District near Baton Rouge had the highest percentage of students performing at basic or above, 85 percent; the New Orleans school system, which still oversees a group of schools that were performing well before Katrina, was second at 82 percent.

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## **New Jersey Governor Christie: Won't defy ruling to give schools more**

Associated Press

By: Staff

May 24, 2011

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hnJaPkvzm-rVSFx2JTi3gQtFpmtA?docId=4091903fc06d450d8b68a50c22a35091>

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie says he will not defy a state Supreme Court ruling to increase aid to low-income school districts.

He says it will be up to the Legislature to decide how to do it.

The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday that the state must increase its funding to low-income school districts by an estimated \$500 million.

That's almost exactly the amount state says it has in a windfall from tax revenues coming in higher than expected. But Christie has said he wanted to use that money for other purposes, including property tax rebates.

Christie previously said he would consider defying the court if he disagreed with the much-anticipated ruling.

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