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NATIONAL NEWS

US education chief says education will fix economy

Associated Press

By: Staff

November 29, 2011

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2011/nov/29/nv-education-secretary-vegas-3rd-ld-writethru/>

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said Tuesday that a post-secondary education remained the surest path to professional and economic success, even as more Americans than ever are going into debt to pursue higher learning.

Duncan said students should consider some form of higher education, including college or vocational training, if they want to more easily secure a job after high school graduation. Outside of mortgages, student loans are the top source of household debt.

"Going to college, by far, is the best long-term investment any individual can make for their future," Duncan told reporters in North Las Vegas. "Some form of higher education has to be the goal of every single young person in this country."

Duncan touted President Barack Obama's student loan relief plan, which would reduce the maximum repayment on student loans from 15 percent of discretionary income annually to 10 percent, among other measures. About 1.6 million borrowers could be affected.

The Education Department has loaned \$490 billion to 23 million borrowers this year, compared to \$102.2 billion to 11.5 million recipients last year.

Duncan's remarks came during his tour across the nation to promote Obama's American Jobs Act, which would set aside tax dollars for teacher salaries and school construction. In all, Duncan made two stops in southern Nevada on Tuesday, first addressing more than 8,000 financial aid workers and students at the Federal Student Aid Fall Conference on the Las Vegas Strip, and later participating in an education panel at the College of Southern Nevada in North Las Vegas.

Duncan also addressed the nation's wounded economy in this hardest-hit state, telling educators and students gathered at the College of Southern Nevada that investment in public schools is the only way to strengthen the nation's work force and compete globally. Nevada tops the nation in foreclosures and unemployment and has some of the most underfunded public schools in the nation.

"We have to educate our way to a better economy," Duncan said. "We are fighting not just for children or education. I really think we are fighting for our country."

Duncan joined education leaders throughout southern Nevada during the town hall, noting Nevada's record high school drop-out rate and urging parents to get more involved in their children's education. Nevada has had the lowest graduation rate of any state since at least 2005, according to a U.S. Department of Education report released earlier this year.

"There's no reason why this state can't move forward in a very rapid rate," Duncan said.

Clark County School District Superintendent Dwight Jones said roughly half of all 12th graders in the district are vulnerable to dropping out this year. He said schools need to be more flexible by helping students achieve proficiency in basic subjects or catch up after falling behind by using online classes and other programs.

He said teachers have the most impact on student proficiency and graduation rates, and that teachers and principals need to be trained on how to create a more fair and effective learning environment.

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Caught Between Common Standards and Assessments

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

November 29, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/11/caught_between_the_standards_a.html

When it comes to common standards, we are pretty much past Adoption Season. (Remember? That was a period of about a year and half in which all but four states adopted the standards.) Now we're in Implementation Season. But if states' and districts' next step is putting the standards into practice, that work isn't exactly flowing across the nation in a rolling wave.

To be clear, there is some very aggressive work going on out there to implement the new standards. But we're also seeing a good number of questions, hesitations, dilemmas, and delays about implementation. A recent case in point was a [study](#) by the Center on Education Policy, which found roughly half of school districts reporting that they aren't really moving ahead in key areas—for a variety of reasons—when it comes to common-standards implementation.

The most recent round came in a conference call I had yesterday with the common-core leadership team at [ASCD](#). A longstanding professional-development group, ASCD smelled the coffee on common standards and, like many other groups, began [resituating itself](#) to provide help to educators as they figure out how to put the new standards into practice. Lead strategist Efrain Mercado Jr. and policy director David Griffith are heading up ASCD's common-core team.

ASCD is holding summits in four states—Arkansas, Colorado, North Carolina, and Utah—to gauge what educators need to move the common standards from paper to practice. One of their findings is that far too few teachers understand the standards.

"Implementation seems to have made its way down to the district level, but often not to the school level and clearly not to the classroom level," Griffith said. "There is a huge need for information, and also resources, about what this is going to look like. And overhanging everything is what the assessments are going to look like."

Most of you already know that two big groups of states are working with federal Race to the Top funds to design assessments for the common standards. Those tests aren't due out until the 2014-15 academic year. (EdWeek is hosting a webinar today, at 2 p.m. Eastern time, by the way, that will feature leaders of those two consortia explaining the work they're doing. [Click here to register](#) and participate, or to go back later and watch the archived webinar.)

What Griffith and Mercado have found in the state summits they've hosted so far is that while some states and districts are forging ahead with curriculum, and even revised or new tests to reflect the new standards, others are hanging back, uncertain of how and whether to take those steps. Much of that is because of the gap between the standards—available now, and adopted by nearly all states—and the tests, which won't be a fully known quantity for three more years.

"The uncertainty over the assessment pieces has kind of paralyzed a lot of people," Griffith said. "It's given them an excuse not to do anything until they see what direction the testing is going to take. We've been telling people not to do this, that they need to get their ducks in a row and move ahead."

"It's confusing because we have accountability tied to current state assessments, yet we are moving toward new standards, but the assessments won't be ready until 2014, and [teachers] have to teach to them now," Mercado said. "How do they impact evaluations between now and then? How do they impact school accountability between now and then? It's left people with their heads on a swivel, like, 'Where do we look?'"

As ASCD talks with members, it's emphasizing that while the common standards cover only math and English/language arts, implementing them should be part of a "whole child" approach to education. That means building in the necessary supports for students to meet the ramped-up expectations, and making sure all students have access to a "broad and enriched curriculum," Griffith said. It means infusing the so-called "21st century skills" into learning, and revamping teacher preparation and professional development to encompass all these things.

ASCD plans to release lesson plans and other resources, based on the feedback it gets from members and its four focus states sometime in 2012, Griffith said. The group will also continue its series of [webinars](#) on the common standards.

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Hoover Institution Experts Identify 2011's Best & Worst Education Events

The Hoover Institution

November 29, 2011

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/hoover-institution-experts-identify-2011s-best-worst-education-events-2011-11-29>

STANFORD, Calif., Nov 29, 2011 (BUSINESS WIRE) -- To inform the public and shape education reform in the upcoming year, members of the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education today released their annual list of the top five best and top five worst events in American education in 2011. Their list indicates that several positive developments led to greater parental choice, system transparency and teacher accountability; however, the worst events indicate that there remains considerable room for improvement.

"We evaluated hundreds of events, laws, programs, and studies in creating this list," said Williamson M. Evers, Hoover research fellow and project coordinator of the Education Task Force's Best and Worst project.

Topping the list as the best educational development in 2011 is reinvigorating school choice via opportunity scholarships and vouchers. The result is private school choice moved ahead in many parts of the country in 2011. The worst development in 2011, according to the task force, has been the misreporting of the Atlanta Public Schools' cheating scandal. Here, Evers said, "when educators couldn't successfully teach their students, they doctored the students' test papers, but the news media let the cheating educators off the hook."

According to Evers, when the task force considered the most counterproductive or foolish developments, it looked for major steps backward. Task force members, Evers said, were dismayed when union power "stopped school districts from making needed reforms" or when a governor's "utopian philosophy" blocked "the possible in the name of the impossible." Task force members found the Obama administration and both parties in Congress were "dismal" when it came to administering reform programs and fixing laws that need updating.

But task force members were heartened when parental power was strengthened in California and voters were given greater say in Indiana. Once-untouchable collective bargaining agreements and teacher-evaluation systems became subject to reform in 2011. This change was welcomed by task force members as it improves flexibility and teacher quality. Indiana's "amazing record" of school reform in 2011, according to Evers, boosted the morale of reformers across the country.

Task force chairman Chester E. Finn Jr. said that in 2012, task force members will continue to support "strengthened academic standards, expanded school choice, and increased accountability." During the next year, the presidential race will offer "a national stage to debate education policy" and Congress is expected to rework the major law authorizing federal aid to education. Finn says that "2012 should be filled with opportunities for improving schools and enhancing students' learning."

BEST Education Events of 2011

1. Reinvigoration of school choice via opportunity scholarships and vouchers.

Despite the attractive choice that private schools (especially Catholic schools) offer in many inner cities and notwithstanding the Supreme Court's resolution of issues of federal constitutionality, private school choice remained largely politically taboo until this year. In what history may view as a watershed, private school choice moved ahead in many places in 2011, including the District of Columbia, where the scholarship program was resuscitated in Congress by Speaker John Boehner; Indiana, where opportunity scholarships were made available to perhaps half the state's students; and Ohio, which lifted a too-tight cap on its program for kids exiting low-performing schools.

2. The rollback of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) in Wisconsin, Indiana, New Jersey, Idaho, and (temporarily) Ohio. Progress in improving education is slowed by union contracts that impede sensible decisions about the hiring, firing, deployment, and compensation of educators. CBAs also drive up costs. Moreover, many public sector workers are generously compensated--and enjoy relatively secure jobs--and their gold-plated benefit systems are bankrupting states and school systems. Voters and courageous state leaders finally put these issues on the table in 2011, and five states made major reforms in the pertinent statutes. (Ohio's were undone in a November referendum.) Besides actual progress in modifying and limiting the scope of CBAs, states have now made changing CBAs a normal area for reform.

3. California State Board of Education's rules that allow the "parent trigger" to operate.

Under the parent trigger, if a petition signed by more than half the parents in a school requests it, a district public school must be turned into a charter school or there must be some other transformational remedy. California was the pacesetter here in 2010. Four more states have since passed laws creating such a mechanism, and similar measures are under consideration in dozens of other states. The implementing rules promulgated by the California State Board of Education during 2011 are crucial, however; without them, the parent trigger would be mired in legal and procedural disputes.

4. Former DC chancellor Michelle Rhee's teacher-evaluation system left in place by new mayor Vincent Gray without substantial change.

When Gray replaced Mayor Adrian Fenty in 2010 with the help of union support, it was widely supposed that he would roll back Rhee's path-breaking teacher-evaluation plan. That plan deviated boldly from standard systems for teacher evaluation, which typically find virtually every teacher's performance satisfactory (or better). The District of Columbia's multifaceted, two-year-old IMPACT system is generally viewed by teachers as fair and is being used--now by Chancellor Kaya Henderson--to judge teacher performance and authorize dismissals based on classroom ineffectiveness (and other factors). It also offers financial rewards to teachers doing the best jobs. It should serve as a national model.

5. Indiana's overall record of education reform.

During 2011, Indiana abolished collective bargaining for teacher benefits and work rules. It allowed all universities to authorize charter schools and removed its cap on charter schools. The legislature also enacted a program of opportunity scholarships for low-income students that Indiana state superintendent Tony Bennett has correctly described as "the nation's most expansive." Indiana moved school board elections from spring to fall, in effect empowering the broader public to participate in the governance of its school systems. In sum, Indiana has the best reform record of any state in 2011.

WORST Education Events of 2011

1. The Atlanta cheating scandal.

This was truly harmful for standards-based education reform, particularly because of how thoroughly it has been misinterpreted

and misrepresented. What the public should have learned from the Atlanta fiasco is that cheating is easily preventable via test security (e.g., having a huge bank of publicly available questions of which a subset appears on each year's test; proctoring the rooms in which tests are given; securing the test papers; online test administration). Instead, what the public has "learned" is that testing is bad because it creates so much stress that well-meaning educators are pushed to the limit and eventually succumb (for the children's sake, of course!) to the temptation to cheat, lie, and break the law.

The cynicism with which some district administrators, teachers, and principals approached their responsibilities to the children of Atlanta is appalling. When they couldn't educate their students, they doctored their test papers in a systemwide effort to mislead parents, public officials, and the community that they were doing a good job. This is all the more discouraging because many Atlanta public school parents are poor and enjoy fewer choices of alternative schools than are available in other major cities.

2. Bungling of reauthorization of No Child Left Behind by a slowpoke Congress and a Constitution-oblivious president. Congress has further delayed the overdue reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act--also known as No Child Left Behind--whose shortcomings have long needed fixing. Both parties share the blame for the delay. Now, using the dilatory Congress as his excuse, President Obama has turned to backdoor legislation-via-waivers. Such waivers will enact his pet reforms (some of which have merit) by decree. But the waivers have major constitutional and legal problems and have created even more bad blood with Congress. Public schools need accountability, whether through standards or school choice (or both). But, thus far, Congress and the president have bungled this.

3. Postponement and delay by Race to the Top-winning states and weak oversight by the Obama administration. From an oversized pool of winners, favoring states with stakeholder (read, union) buy-in in 2010, to slowdowns in the pace of innovation by winners, to the administration's acquiescence to such dithering, this is no longer a race at all. States plod forward with tepid reforms. Delays are widespread. Where are the overdue, promised expansion of the number of charter schools, the promised performance-based teacher pay programs, and the promised data systems linking teachers to their students' test results? Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and, in particular, Hawaii are shameful laggards when it comes to teacher evaluations, which they promised to base in large measure on student gains.

Taxpayers watching this fixed race should demand their money back.

4. Governor Jerry Brown moving California from bad to worse.

Governor Brown signed California's AB 114, under which districts must retain staffing levels in the face of budget tightening--but may cut up to seven instructional days from the school year. What is the worst possible way to deal with school district budget woes? Shortening the year. But California, always proud of being a leader, has written into law that this is the preferred option when districts face budgetary shortfalls.

As if to top this off, when vetoing SB 547, Brown dismissed the use of test-score data and signaled that he'd like to do away with testing altogether. Does this portend the demise of accountability in our largest state? He complained, among other things, that test scores don't measure "good character" or "love of learning."

5. The unions' victory in Ohio in overturning Governor Kasich's collective bargaining reforms.

Ohio's public sector unions are understandably upset by the reform of their own collective bargaining laws and practices, and on election day in November, they managed to undo a major reform measure. In reality, this vote had little to do with education--most Ohioans favor the kinds of education changes in that law (Senate Bill 5)--but, rather, with the police and firefighters who appeared on television all autumn suggesting that crime would rise and fires would burn if this measure were not undone. (It was a well-orchestrated and extremely well-funded campaign.)

Yet fiscal reality will have to be faced eventually. Ohio is already on the verge of collapse. Its school districts face a deficit of close to \$8 billion by 2015. Polls show that Ohio voters want benefits for public employees to resemble those in the private sector. In time, that means, Ohio teachers will have to pay more toward their health benefits and accept other reasonable changes or their districts will go broke and their students' learning will never improve.

Hoover's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education focuses on education policy solutions that stress choice, accountability, and transparency. For more information on the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education, visit Hoover.org or find us Facebook, Twitter, and Scribd (keyword:Hoover Institution).

Participants in the Koret Task Force's Best and Worst Project

-- Williamson M. Evers is project coordinator of the Koret Task Force on K--12 Education project on the Best and Worst in American Education, 2011. He is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a former U.S. assistant secretary of education.

-- Chester E. Finn Jr., Task Force on K--12 Education chairman, is a senior fellow at Hoover and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

-- John E. Chubb is a distinguished visiting fellow at Hoover and CEO of Leeds Global Partners.

-- Eric Hanushek is the Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at Hoover and chairman of the Executive Committee for the Texas Schools Project at the University of Texas at Dallas. He was featured in last year's documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, for his research on teacher accountability.

-- Paul T. Hill is a Hoover Institution distinguished visiting fellow and professor and director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington.

-- Caroline M. Hoxby is a senior fellow at Hoover, the Scott and Donya Bommer Professor at Stanford University, and director of the Economics of Education Program at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

-- Tom Loveless is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

-- Terry M. Moe is a senior fellow at Hoover and the William Bennett Munro Professor of Political Science at Stanford University.

-- Paul E. Peterson is a senior fellow at Hoover and the Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Government and director of the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University.

-- Herbert J. Walberg is a distinguished visiting fellow at Hoover and chairman of the board of directors of the Heartland Institute.

SOURCE: Hoover Institution

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STATE NEWS

Charter Schools Sue New Jersey, Claiming They've Been Shortchanged

New Jersey Spotlight

By: John Mooney

November 30, 2011

<http://www.njspointlight.com/stories/11/1130/0053/>

Latest development only adds to the tensions between charters and the districts that host them

A group of Jersey City charter schools have sued the Christie administration to correct what they say has been a stark underfunding of their schools, throwing a twist into the ongoing debate over how New Jersey's charters are paid for.

The four charter schools -- Learning Community, Golden Door, Soaring Heights, and Ethical Community charter -- have petitioned acting education commissioner Chris Cerf to address what has been a longstanding disparity in the how Jersey City and several other districts' charter schools are funded.

In the petition, the schools contend that they are put at a unique disadvantage because of Jersey City's massive property tax abatements, which draw the school district additional state aid -- called adjustment aid -- that is not shared with the charters.

As a result, the charters receive less than the 90 percent of the district's per-pupil costs, as mandated under the state's charter school law. Other charter schools similarly affected are in Asbury Park, Hoboken, and Red Bank.

The case also points up the continuing and unresolved disputes in how New Jersey charter schools are funded in general, one that not only irks charter schools but also the districts that foot most of the bill.

These disputes have dogged the Christie administration as it seeks to rewrite the state's charter school law and expand the experimental schools, especially in lower-performing, urban districts such as Jersey City. And now Cerf is being asked to make a ruling that could appease the charters but add still more tension to the situation.

The Jersey City issue is not new, as the city's charter schools have long argued for additional funding to address the disparity due to adjustment aid. And the administration this year did provide an additional \$5.1 million for the Jersey City and other affected charters to offset some of the shortfall.

But representatives of the charters argued that the one-time appropriation does not address the fundamental flaw in the funding law that will leave them shortchanged each year.

"We're obviously hugely grateful for [the additional funds], but it comes from an appropriation and is hardly sustainable," said Shelley Skinner, a board member at Learning Community Charter School and longtime charter advocate who has pressed hardest for the funding.

"We're required to provide a thorough and efficient education like everyone else, but we don't have the resources," she said. "Parents didn't just waive their right to that when they enroll in a charter, and that is what the state is asking them to do."

The funding of charters has been particularly problematic in urban districts, where the traditional schools have received billions in additional aid under the Abbott v. Burke school equity rulings to provide what the state constitution calls a "thorough and efficient" education. But districts have not necessarily been required to pass a proportionate share of that additional aid to charter schools.

The existing School Funding Reform Act aimed to address that, but the adjustment aid continued to be left out of the calculation. For some districts, there is not much adjustment aid to start with, so the disparities are much smaller. Others like Jersey City are not as fortunate.

"With the new funding formula that eliminated the separate Abbott funding, we hoped this would go away," said Rick Pressler, a program director with the New Jersey Charter Schools Association. "But it simply took a new form with different district winners and losers with the adjustment aid."

Pressler said the issue could be addressed with a simple tweak in the law to include the adjustment aid in the charter school funding calculation. "It would literally require adding two words and a comma to the statute," he said.

But unable to win that concession, the Jersey City charters said they will rely on the legal process, starting with the petition to Cerf and likely determination by an administrative law judge.

Cerf this week said he could not comment on the case due to it being pending litigation.

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As Michigan House wraps up charter school testimony, Senate Democrats propose ban on for-profit firms running schools

Grand Rapids Press

By: Dave MurrayMLive.com

November 29, 2011

http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2011/11/as_house_wraps_up_charter_scho.html

LANSING – As a state House committee considers lifting the cap on charter schools, two Senate Democrats say they'll try to slow the growth by introducing a constitutional amendment banning schools operated by a for-profit entity.

About 80 percent of the state's 255 charter schools use a management company for varying levels of services, and many of the companies are for-profit firms.

Sens. Rebekah Warren, D-Ann Arbor, and Hoon-Yung Hopgood, D-Taylor, on Tuesday said Senate Republicans last month approved bills “essentially opening the doors to business run, for-profit schools and increased privatization of teachers and school workers. This constitutional amendment aims to protect children from having their education compromised at the expense of corporate profits.”

Warren said state schools “should not be guided by a mission statement focused on making a profit. Michigan’s children deserve to receive an education focused on their success and empowerment – a mission with no room for profits and corporate management.”

Warren said allowing management companies “to continue profiting off the backs of our children is unacceptable. The proposed amendment would put an end to for-profit schools, ensuring that the focus of Michigan’s education system remain on providing the best possible education to each child.”

Charter advocates dismissed the proposed constitutional amendment as “an unfortunate distraction.”

“This is a narrowly focused attack on some charter schools,” said Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. “Nobody argues that we have struggling schools, both charters and traditional schools. Where are their solutions?”

Quisenberry said many, many firms do business with traditional and charter schools, and many make a profit.

“Education is a \$14 billion business in Michigan,” he said.

As Warren and Hopgood conducted a press conference, the House Education Committee listened to about three hours of testimony amid an overflowing meeting room, listening to educators, parents and students.

Southfield Board of Education Vice President Fern Katz, whose district shares a border with Detroit, said she opposed the cap, saying the lawmakers are operating under “the mistaken notion that charter schools will help children.”

“Yes, there are good charter schools,” she told the committee. “But I have yet to meet a superintendent or principal who does not complain about the negative impact that charters have on education.”

Committee chairman Thomas McMillin, R-Rochester, asked whether Southfield parents should have other choices if they are not satisfied with what their district offer.

“We are satisfied with our education,” Katz said, adding that she would oppose offering more choices if they came at the expense of district-run schools.

But Katz was followed by two students from FlexTech High School in Brighton, a blended learning charter program that allows students to complete part of their work in the classroom and the rest on the Internet.

Freshman Amelia Moorehouse, 14, said the school's flexible schedule allows her to pursue an extensive gymnastics regimen while maintaining straight-As.

Moorehouse said she communicates every day with teachers either in person or through email, and advisors make sure students don't fall behind.

“I feel like I'm getting more individual attention from my teachers than ever before,” she said. “FlexTech might not be right for every student, but it's right for me.”

McMillin's committee is considering a Senate bill 618, which backers have said is intended to offer parents with children in struggling schools more choices as well as attract successful charter school operators from out of state.

But representatives from some school groups said they like the idea of adding more charter schools, but called on the House to add provisions that would limit the growth to operators that have a track record of success.

“New charter schools should not be authorized blindly,” said Harrison Blackmond of Progressives for Quality Charter Schools.

"The bill you are considering lack oversight and accountability mechanisms. We can't afford to make misguided education decisions now, we've made too many in the past."

The committee is scheduled to meet again on Wednesday, possibly voting on the issue.

"We've had 12 weeks of testimony between the Senate and the House," McMillin said. "I think we'll be ready."

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Iowa Governor to Wait on Teacher Pay Plan, Build Support

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

November 28, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/11/iowa_governor_to_wait_on_teacher_pay_plan_build_support.html

The recent tendency of state governors on education policy has been to push for major changes—and to get them done right now. Iowa's Terry Branstad appears to be taking a different approach.

The Republican governor has told reporters that he will wait a year before attempting to pass his [sweeping proposal](#) to overhaul teacher pay in order to build support for the plan.

Branstad earlier this year unveiled a far-reaching proposal to overhaul of teacher pay and evaluation. It would create a series of new teacher designations—master, mentor, apprentice, and career—which would serve as the basis for compensation. Teachers would advance within those designations based on experience, performance, evaluation, and competitive selection.

"We found that there's a lot of questions and a lot of information that needs to be provided," Branstad said, [according](#) to the Associated Press. "We intend to move forward, but we've moved it back a year."

The Iowa Department of Education is assembling a task force on teacher pay and teacher leadership, agency spokeswoman Staci Hupp said in an e-mail. The teacher-pay plan was part of a broad package of proposals put forward by Branstad this year, which included ideas for everything from setting tougher standards for students advancing from 3rd grade to 4th grade to establishing a clearer process for approving charter schools and giving more flexibility to local school districts. Many of those ideas are "still on the table" for the upcoming legislative session, said Hupp, even though the teacher-pay model won't be.

The Iowa governor's build-consensus-slowly approach on teacher pay stands in contrast to the approach taken by Republicans in many states on education policy, such as [Wisconsin](#) and [Ohio](#), where major changes have drawn varying degrees of backlash.

Many other states have approved changes in teacher pay and evaluation, as well as laws affecting tenure; last-in, first-out layoff practices, and other policies.

Of course, Branstad is working in a different political environment than governors in Wisconsin and Ohio (Democrats control one of his state's [legislative chambers](#)), and he may believe his proposal is more likely to have more staying power if it has more buy-in, up front.

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Chicago Mayor defends choice to oversee school 'turnarounds'

Chicago Sun Times

By: Fran Spielman

November 30, 2011

<http://www.suntimes.com/news/education/9142239-418/mayor-defends-choice-to-oversee-school-turnarounds.html>

With school closings looming, Mayor Rahm Emanuel went on the offensive Tuesday against the Chicago Teachers Union's claim that it's a conflict to have the Academy of Urban School Leadership oversee six public schools targeted for sweeping "turnarounds" in which all employees are removed.

David Vitale, Emanuel's handpicked school board president, once served as chairman of the AUSL board. Tim Cawley, chief administrative officer at the Chicago Public Schools, previously held a top job at the organization.

Those close ties did not stop Emanuel, a champion of the AUSL model, from handing the organization its largest turnaround assignment ever in a single year.

"It is a model that is unique to Chicago's success. It is working here superbly. ... There would be a conflict if I didn't do it — that I had a great model that L.A. wants to steal from us, and I held it back," Emanuel said, after joining Schools CEO Jean-Claude Brizard for a roundtable with the parents of AUSL students at the Morton School of Excellence, 431 N. Troy.

"It is not a conflict to give kids a good education. It's the responsibility I have as mayor. The conflict would be if I knew it was

here and I was scared to do it because of politics. I told you I would spend political capital to make sure the kids of Chicago have the opportunity to do something in their lives. ... I will not let politics stand in the way. That would be a conflict that is shameful.”

CTU President Karen Lewis, who went toe-to-toe with Emanuel on the issue of a longer school day, held her own news conference to question the “lack of transparency” in selecting the schools to undergo turnarounds. If approved, the plan will force 429 teachers and non-teaching staff members to look for new jobs, although they can reapply to work at their original schools under new leadership.

Lewis waved the red flag about the alleged conflict.

“The fact that AUSL is the beneficiary of these turnarounds and that the board president and the chief administrative officer have ties to AUSL — it doesn’t sit that well with us. It feels like a conflict of interest. That should be dealt with on some level,” she said.

CPS claims the 12 turnaround schools already under the AUSL umbrella have more than doubled the district average growth in 2011 ISAT test scores.

But Lewis said, “We are concerned about how these actions demoralize our students, further decrease their confidence in themselves and also rips them from the adults they do know and have built relationships with.”

AUSL’s turnaround strategy uses comprehensive teacher training and collaboration, rigorous course work and standards, tutoring in reading and math and extra-curricular activities to help students in chronically-failing schools catch up to their peers.

“You can’t do ‘turnaround light.’ You have to have school leadership. You have to have teachers that are well-trained. And you have to have enough of them in the building so that you can make a fundamental change in the culture of the school,” said Martin Koldyke, AUSL’s founder and chairman emeritus.

Although the formula seems to be working elsewhere, Koldyke acknowledged Tuesday that the CPS school that has had an AUSL at the helm after a turnaround the longest — Sherman Elementary — has yet to achieve system-wide averages after five years.

“Sherman has done okay, but it hasn’t shown the kind of changes that our people are seeking. They’re not pleased with the way kids are catching on,” he said.

“We’ve had a recent change of leadership there. That’s one thing that Jarvis Sanford [AUSL’s managing director of elementary schools] doesn’t put up with. He makes sure that the leadership is up to snuff and we’re getting the kind of results that we need.”

CPS is expected to drop the other shoe later this week — by announcing this year’s round of school closings.

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