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NATIONAL NEWS

Study: More States Give High Schools Data on Students' College Progress

Education Week

By: Sarah D. Sparks

December 19, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2011/12/data_study_states_give_more_co.html

More than [one in five](#) college freshmen end up taking at least one remediation course, according to federal estimates, but states are doing a better job of providing feedback to high schools about when they need to beef up course rigor, according to new data from the Data Quality Campaign.

The DQC's new reports on [high school feedback](#) and [early warning systems](#) to prevent dropouts find that nearly every state now has the capacity to make real connections between K-12 and postsecondary student information.

According to the DQC, 39 states give high schools feedback reports on how their graduates perform academically in postsecondary education. Of these, 28 states include information on the students who need to take remedial classes once they reach campus. For the most part, this information is limited to the students who stay in-state, at public universities; only a dozen states give high schools feedback on the 19 percent of high school graduates who attend out-of-state or private colleges.

The Washington-based group pointed to Kentucky as a model for other states. My colleague Caralee Adams has [reported](#) on some of the ways that state is connecting high school administrators with the information to help them give their students a stronger foundation for college.

The group plans to follow up after the new year with a closer look at how states connect education and jobs data

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STATE NEWS

Louisiana gets college-prep grant

Baton Rouge Advocate

By: Staff

December 20, 2011

<http://theadvocate.com/home/1609342-125/state-gets-college-prep-grant.html>

Louisiana is one of 10 states to receive a new grant aimed at preparing students for college and reducing the need for remedial coursework.

The "Core to College: Preparing Students for College Readiness and Success" grant is worth \$600,000 over three years and comes from the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

The goal is to increase collaborations between public schools and colleges while focusing students on achieving the grades to

meet the state's core curriculum standards, according to the Louisiana Board of Regents.

The funds also will be used to develop and a statewide definition for "college readiness" and to work toward aligning colleges and schools with achieving the standards, the Regents announcement states.

"We, in higher education, will never be able to reach our goal of increasing the educational attainment of our citizenry to the (southern regional) average by 2025 if we don't partner with our colleagues in K-12 to ensure more students not only graduate from high school, but do so ready to succeed in college and in a career," state Commissioner of Higher Education Jim Purcell said in a prepared statement.

Campus leadership teams also will be created for every public college campus in the state to increase collaborative efforts and create aligned goals within each campus community, according to the Regents.

The other nine states receiving the grants are Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oregon and Washington. The states were selected based on geographic diversity, existing collaborations and the demonstrated capacity to undertake the work.

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New Jersey: Newark to Adopt National College Entrance Exam

New Jersey Spotlight

By: John Mooney

[December 20, 2011](#)

<http://www.njspointlight.com/stories/11/1220/0013/>

Trying to get a better fix on student needs, district plans to add ACT to current tests

Not satisfied with New Jersey's state tests, the new superintendent of Newark schools will turn to a national college entrance test to help her gauge whether high school students are meeting college and career needs.

Superintendent Cami Anderson said she would start testing students this year on the ACT, a college entrance exam comparable to the SAT, which is popular in the South and Midwest. The testing would start in 8th grade with some of ACT's companion exams for the younger grades.

The move is one of Anderson's most sweeping yet in trying to improve the high schools in New Jersey's largest and arguably most troubled district, where only about half of incoming 9th grade students graduate four years later.

The new testing would be on top of the state's standardized exams, Anderson said. These are given in the 8th grade and then again in the 11th grade, with the High School Proficiency Assessment, which is required for graduation.

The Christie administration itself has said the HSPA is not rigorous enough and should be replaced, and Anderson said yesterday that in discussions with her principals, there was agreement that the HSPA wasn't any good in measuring students over time either.

"They, like many principals, felt what we currently have is inadequate," Anderson said in an interview. "The HSPA is not a great test, and we only give it once. So with a ninth grader, the next indicator we have on them right now is when they graduate – or not – after taking the HSPA."

States are increasingly moving to the ACT and similar tests as part of their high school assessments, with more than 20 states using the ACT in one form or another as a statewide test or instructional program. New Jersey's acting education commissioner Chris Cerf has mentioned ACT as a possible statewide exam here, too. The state's contract for HSPA runs out this year.

The state is also moving toward a separate nationally developed test aimed to match the Common Core State Standards, but that is not expected to be ready until 2014.

But the use of the ACT hasn't been without criticism. While gaining popularity as a more rounded exam than the SAT, critics have said it still leads to a narrowing of curriculum. The National Council of Teachers of English issued a report in 2005 that was particularly critical of its writing section as an unreliable measure of ability.

"The ACT was not designed to assess curricula or NJ core standards," said Stan Karp, a program director with the Education Law Center and frequent critic of the state's testing systems. "It's a four and a half hour commercial test designed to predict college performance. What will four years of such testing for all students cost? What evidence is there that this will improve instruction?"

"Test-driven reform has been a colossal failure," he said. "We should be investing in the ability of teachers and school leaders to do other forms of assessment not more standardized multiple choice tests."

Anderson maintained that the ACT overall had the backing of research as a strong predictor of college success, and it would

serve as a powerful motivator for students aiming for college.

She also said its individualized reports of student results are detailed and constructive, and most of all, they will allow the district to see if and how students are progressing year to year. "You'll be able to see the gains and the growth," she said.

Whether it means extra testing in at least 8th and 11th grades, Anderson said it will be worth the comparison with existing exams. "If we handle them right, I think students and their families will see the value added," she said.

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Florida Board of Education approves new FCAT scores

Associated Press

By: Christine Armario

December 19, 2011

<http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/12/19/2552925/state-board-of-ed-to-vote-on-fcat.html>

The state Board of Education approved a new set of passing scores for Florida's standardized test on Monday designed to ensure students are ready for college, but which could also have the effect of more students failing.

The board voted unanimously in favor of the new scores for the revised Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test in math and reading during a conference call. Under the new scores, the percentage of students not earning a high enough score to advance to the fourth grade or graduate from high school is likely to increase.

According to state estimates, the number of students not passing the third grade FCAT reading exam - required in order to advance to the fourth grade - would rise from 16 to 18 percent. Meanwhile, the number earning a high enough score to pass the 10th grade exam, required to graduate, is slated to decline from 60 to 52 percent.

Barbara Foorman, director of the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University, said the new scores will help counter a problem seen in the current FCAT scoring: High numbers of students pass in the elementary and middle school grades, but then find themselves unable to pass the high school FCAT exam.

Increasing the rigor of the third grade exam, she said, will help make sure students are prepared for the content they encounter in later grades.

"If you have more rigorous standards in the lower grades, it puts the attention not just on passing third grade FCAT, but on kindergarten, first and second grade, which is the time you can have successful remediation," Foorman said.

The immediate effect, however, could be a significant increase in the number of students not passing the test in the lower grade levels, which means more students enrolled in summer remedial education or being held back at third grade.

"It's going to be a shock to the system," Foorman said.

State Rep. Dwight Bullard, a teacher and ranking Democrat on the House Education Committee, called the board's action disappointing and the FCAT an "irrelevant examination."

"It's even more appalling that now they want to make the test even harder for students to pass," the Miami lawmaker said in a statement. "I find these efforts folly."

Bullard said Florida should focus instead on helping students get a well-rounded education.

The new scores follow the recommendation Education Commissioner Gerard Robinson issued earlier this month, including a passing FCAT 10th grade reading score that is two points higher than what a panel of education and community leaders had recommended. Education Department officials say the raised score will help reduce the high rate of students who need to take remedial education in college, and note that students can take the test again if they do not pass on a first try.

State Sen. Bill Montford, D-Tallahassee, CEO of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, said the new scores would have been more aligned for elementary, middle and high school students had the board adopted the recommended cutoff points issued by the panel of educators and two other committees.

Montford said he is concerned about projections showing that more high school students will not pass the exam. He said that could have the effect of more students needing to take remedial classes and missing out on electives.

"There's an expense to that," Montford added. "The state has got to step up and fund those additional remediation classes."

Teachers will also be affected by the new scoring system; under a wide reaching education law passed earlier this year, their evaluations will be tied to how much students advance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

Sam Whitten, assistant director for assessment and accountability at Hillsborough County Public Schools, said the panel's recommended cut score for the reading exam would have increased the number of students who fail by about 8,000 students. With the higher score adopted by the board, that number is slated to rise to about 15,000.

"Finding out the cut scores and the criteria in the middle of a school year is difficult for schools to prepare for," Whitten said.

Students first took the revised FCAT, which is designed to test students on the more rigorous Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, in the spring. It has been a decade since the FCAT cut scores were last adjusted.

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Indiana Schools Grapple With Voucher Law's Impact

Education Week

By: Jaclyn Zubrzycki

December 19, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/12/19/15indiana.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/12/19/15indiana.h31.html?k=SVXFdT6QhpW45W8Dp%2F%2BVW9zct%2BNMikUOd05x&cmp=clp-edweek)

[k=SVXFdT6QhpW45W8Dp%2F%2BVW9zct%2BNMikUOd05x&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/12/19/15indiana.h31.html?k=SVXFdT6QhpW45W8Dp%2F%2BVW9zct%2BNMikUOd05x&cmp=clp-edweek)

As the 3,919 students who participated in the first year of Indiana's new, wide-reaching school voucher program near the end of the first semester in their new schools, the program faces up to its next challenge: A state court hearing opens today on a lawsuit arguing the program violates Indiana's constitution.

The [Choice Scholarship program](#), one of a number of education reforms passed and signed into law by Indiana's Republican-dominated state government during this year's legislative session, has drawn national attention for a number of bold components. It is the only active voucher program in the country that is [not limited to low-income students](#) or students who have attended a low-performing school, and the only active voucher program with no eventual cap on enrollment.

With the program moving into full gear, public schools across the state are bracing for an outflow of funds from already-tight budgets while private schools prepare for an increased demand for spaces in their classrooms. Meanwhile, debate still rages over the initiative as schools and families consider the financial, educational, and social consequences of a program that is projected to grow substantially. Advocates say the voucher program allows all families to make a choice once limited to the well-off; opponents question its constitutionality and wonder if the program is really serving who it's intended to serve.

Challenges

Today's hearing over the program, scheduled to take place in the Marion (County) Superior Court, in Indianapolis, stems from a lawsuit filed by a group of citizens with backing from the National Education Association. It questions whether the voucher program meets Indiana's constitutional obligation to provide a common education to its students and whether public funds can go to private religious institutions. Nearly all of the private schools signed up for the program so far are religiously affiliated. Indiana State Superintendent Tony Bennett, who is a defendant in the case along with his fellow Republican, Gov. Mitch Daniels, said in an interview that he believes the law will be upheld. A motion for an injunction was rejected by a judge this summer, and the law went into effect as scheduled on July 1.

"We continue to believe in the merits of the case," countered Nate G. Schnellenberger, president of the Indiana State Teachers Association, an affiliate of the National Education Association, in an interview. "The state tries to make a case the money is not going directly to a religious institution because of the way our voucher law is constructed ... but if we follow the trail of the money, it goes from state to parent to religious institution. Virtually all of the students using vouchers are enrolled in religious schools," Mr. Schnellenberger said.

As far as providing a more-equal opportunity, Mr. Schnellenberger said, "It's a concern again that—in certain cases—those private schools would not have to accept students who have either physical or learning disabilities. And that we think that goes against the constitutional requirement for a uniform system."

The law will likely not be free of legal challenges for a while. John M. West, a lawyer representing the plaintiffs, said appeals were likely however the judge rules. Rick Muir, president of the Indiana Federation of Teachers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, said his union was also in the process of developing a lawsuit.

The legal precedent is unclear: Challenges to voucher programs in other states have yielded "a mixed bag" of results, said Jennifer Dounay Zinth, senior policy analyst at the Education Commission of the States, a Denver-based research and information-sharing organization.

But Indiana's law was built with the lessons of other states' programs in mind, said Terry E. Spradlin, the director for education policy at the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, at Indiana University in Bloomington. "Based on experiences in Wisconsin, Florida, and Ohio, I think they've learned," he said. "This law was crafted in such a way that it does stand a good chance of holding up through the litigation process."

Implementation

If the program does remain in effect, school officials anticipate that far more than 3,919 students eventually will enroll. This school year, the law would have permitted 7,500 vouchers. That cap jumps to 15,000 next year, and in 2013-14, the cap will be lifted altogether. "The level of participation is not an indication of interest," said Indiana University's Mr. Spradlin. "It's more or less half of the cap, but we shouldn't interpret it because of the timing of when it passed."

The law went into effect on July 1, and applications were due Sept. 16, leaving families little time to apply. Students who had spent the previous two semesters in Indiana public schools or who were attending private school on certain state-funded scholarships are eligible for the vouchers. Participants can continue to use the vouchers as long as they continue to meet the income requirement.

As more families become interested, more schools are also likely to participate. Of the state's more-than-400 private schools,

260 accepted vouchers this year; 98 percent of [those schools](#) are affiliated with a religious organization.

Of the private schools that didn't enroll, some are waiting to see how the program unfolds, and "some have philosophical issues and would prefer not to accept state dollars," said John Elcesser, the executive director of the Indiana Non-Public Education Association. But he said he anticipated that more schools would eventually take part in the program.

The law requires participating schools to address certain pieces of Indiana's government and history in their curricula and participate in state tests, but those requirements are "not a real heavy lift for state-accredited schools" like the state's Roman Catholic schools, which are used to meeting certain state requirements, Mr. Elcesser said. State Superintendent Bennett also emphasized that low-performing private schools can be taken out of the program.

Mr. Bennett suggested that new, nonreligious schools might form to take advantage of the program. Robert C. Enlow, the president and chief executive officer of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, an Indiana-based advocacy group, said that has been the tendency in other states. "Over time, it changes," Mr. Enlow added. "New schools start out and they tend to be more secular."

Of the first year's batch of students, 593 were from middle-income families. They qualified for a 50 percent voucher; the rest of the participating students qualified for a full voucher. About 53 percent of the voucher recipients are minority students, while the state's population is about 84 percent white. Mr. Bennett said the demographic breakdown of voucher recipients is evidence that the program is reaching those it was intended to reach: "When we first proposed this, that was the exact demographic that many folks were saying would be left in public schools."

Jon G. Ellis, the executive director of the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents, took a different perspective, pointing to the fact that the percentage of Indiana students enrolled in nonpublic schools has remained constant since 1989. "It doesn't appear to me that there's been any great shift. We've always had about 5 percent looking for a way to leave public schools. We've just decided to pay them to look for a way," he said.

According to Jenny S. Andorfer, the director of admissions at the private Bishop Luers High School, in Fort Wayne, "I had a lot of people call me and register subsequently once they knew the voucher program had passed. But really the majority of our voucher monies went to students that we already had registered to come here for this school year." Ms. Andorfer had reached out to students whom she noticed might qualify. This year, 59 students used a voucher towards tuition at Bishop Luers, which approaches \$7,000 for families that don't belong to Roman Catholic parishes affiliated with the school.

Deborah Torres, a parent of a freshman who moved from a public school to Bishop Luers this year with the help of a voucher, described a dilemma the bill had caused her family: The Torres's were eligible for a full voucher this year, but "if we made \$200 more, it would cause \$3,000 more in tuition for us," as they would be eligible only for a partial, rather than a full, voucher.

"With the economy and different things, you don't know. It's scary to know that you may or may not be able to keep your child in a situation you've already gone out of your way and prayed about and got them into," Ms. Torres said.

School Competition

To help its schools with the transition, the Catholic Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend hired a School Choice Specialist. Advocacy groups like School Choice Indiana informed parents of the program, and schools reached out through church bulletins and ads, said Mark D. Myers, superintendent of the diocese of Fort Wayne Catholic Schools.

Public schools also stepped up public-relations efforts. Mr. Bennett described a superintendent visiting his office: "Down at the end of his tie was the district logo. And in the middle was written, 'free tuition to the best school district in Howard County.'" Schools in Kokomo put up signs promoting the district. Mark E. GiaQuinta of the Fort Wayne Community School Board said the district had also run a principal-for-a-day program for "community leaders, especially skeptics."

Karyle M. Green, superintendent of East Allen Community Schools, said her district would reach out to students who'd left: "We're going to be contacting our people in the spring and see if they're happy after they've left us, if there's anything we can do to get them to come back."

State Superintendent Bennett and other advocates of the program said this sort of competition was one of the goals of the voucher program and would lead to better public schools.

But Krista J. Stockman, a spokeswoman for the Fort Wayne Community Schools, said public schools could use more data about which students were leaving and why. That data is currently held by the state education department for privacy reasons. "We understand we are in a consumer-driven society. We believe that we are offering a high-quality product for our students, and we continually strive to do better," Ms. Stockman said, "If there's something more that people are looking for that people expect of us, we want to know about that."

Money Troubles

In November, school districts received a memo from the state education department stating how much money would leave their budgets due to the voucher program. The agency retracted the memo soon afterward and later issued a clarification. The initial memo "gave superintendents an [inaccurate] impression that there'd be an immediate hit and that it wouldn't have to do with how many students were taking vouchers," said Stephanie Sample, a spokeswoman for the state department of education.

That's only somewhat reassuring to districts. Fort Wayne's Ms. Stockman said, "We stand to lose as much as \$2.4 million in state funding with 392 students taking vouchers. But we're not able to cut teachers or cut expenses, because we're not losing 30 students in 3rd grade at one school. We're losing them across the district."

In East Allen, the district's enrollment declined from 9,996 to 9,408, said Ms. Green, the superintendent. The decline included 90 students who left using vouchers.

Advocates argue that the program eventually will save the state money. "The voucher program only takes 70 percent or 90 percent of the per-student allocation," said Ms. Sample. If a child withdraws from a private school, the state will receive a prorated refund from the school. The savings from the vouchers are in the state's general fund, said Ms. Sample, and the department will distribute savings to schools in late spring or early summer based on schools' overall share of the state funding formula. But there are still kinks to be worked out, and a state tax credit for parents sending their children to private schools may negate those savings, according to [analysis from the Cato Institute](#), a think tank based in Washington.

Superintendent Bennett said he felt claims that the voucher program was about privatizing public education were “disingenuous.” “Folks who talk about it being about privatizing education disguise that argument under the veil that nothing in education has ever been privatized,” he said, alluding to textbooks and transportation services provided by private companies. “My belief is the voucher program is part of a comprehensive system that puts accountability and freedom into education.”

Serving All

Opponents of the program question whether the private schools are really an option for all students. Private schools are able to select the students who attend their schools, and can ask students who do not meet behavioral or academic standards to leave. At Bishop Luers, principal Mary T. Keefer said she'd only rejected two students who'd applied: “One was a senior and only had 17 credits. Our state requires 49. I don't want to set a child up for failure. Her brother had straight Fs on his 8th grade report card.” Two of the initial 59 students have also been asked to leave the school due to behavioral issues. Ms. Keefer said it was difficult to let students go, but “everybody who comes, new freshmen and upperclassmen, has to acclimate.”

Mr. Ellis, of the superintendents association, was critical of such risks: “We don't want our students leaving a school because of a glitzy ad campaign only to find that they don't meet the standards of the neighborhood Catholic school.”

The situation is particularly knotty for special needs students; currently, there is no special-needs voucher program, and students with certain disabilities who enroll in private schools sometimes need services provided only at public schools. State Superintendent Bennett said that he would support a special education voucher program.

Looking Forward

As private schools begin enrollment for next year and the law moves through the courts, Indiana schools and families are waiting to see if enrollment will increase and how the program will impact schools around the state. Rumors have spread about families withdrawing children from private schools in order to become eligible for the program and return to the private schools; Indiana University's Mr. Spradlin pointed to St. Charles Borromeo School in Fort Wayne as a school that had seen some students leave.

Public and private schools around the state are looking at their own enrollment lists and budgets with that uncertainty in mind. At Bishop Luers, principal Keefer is considering converting part-time classrooms to full-time classrooms, using offices for classes, and hiring more teachers. In the public schools, superintendents will see budget numbers reflecting departures due to the voucher program in January.

Frank A. Bush, president of the Indiana State School Boards Association, said, “Whether these reforms we're seeing in Indiana, which have many components beyond vouchers, have staying power remains to be seen. But it's clear we're in a parental choice era. ... The debate's over in many ways.”

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Oregon online schools panel fizzles without proposal

Associated Press

By: Jonathan J. Cooper

December 16, 2011

http://www.wral.com/news/national_world/national/story/10510260/

SALEM, ORE. — A committee created in a grand bargain to settle issues from one of the most contentious battles of the last Oregon legislative session — the expansion of online charter schools — has disbanded without proposing any changes.

The Task Force on Virtual School Governance was supposed to recommend ways to improve the oversight of online schools. Its creation helped sway three Democrats to switch their votes, allowing the narrow passage of a contentious bill giving more students access to Internet-based learning.

But the panel issued a report this week asking the Legislature only for authority to expand its scope and continue working next year. The report says the panel got a late start and didn't have enough time to thoroughly investigate the topic.

It was supposed to issue the report by Oct. 1, but didn't hold its first meeting until Nov. 3, in part because Gov. John Kitzhaber's office was slow to make appointments for two of the five seats on the panel.

"I'd rather they take the time to do it right than just rush to meet an artificial deadline," said Rep. Chris Garrett, D-Lake Oswego.

Garrett initially voted against the online school bill but later changed his vote when proponents agreed to create the task force and study ways to improve the governance of online schools. He said he also changed his vote because he didn't think many parents would choose online schools for their children.

Reps. Brian Clem, D-Salem, and Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, also changed their votes to support the measure after initially opposing it.

Rep. Michael Dembrow, a Portland Democrat who chaired the task force, said the field of online learning is rapidly evolving and the committee wanted specific authority from the Legislature to study more than just full-time online schooling.

About 4,400 attended online charter schools full time last year, according to data in the task force report. So-called virtual schools are now governed by the same laws that govern charter schools, and critics say the regulations are not well suited to

online schools.

Kitzhaber spokesman Tim Raphael said the governor's office wishes it could have made the appointments sooner but doesn't think it would've allowed the panel to create legislation in time for the Legislature's February session.

"We support the commission taking the time it needs to give the issue the attention it deserves," Raphael said

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