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NATIONAL NEWS

Opinion: Education Needs a Digital-Age Upgrade

New York Times

By: Virginia Heffernan

August 7, 2011

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/07/education-needs-a-digital-age-upgrade/?ref=opinion>

If you have a child entering grade school this fall, file away just one number with all those back-to-school forms: 65 percent.

Chances are just that good that, in spite of anything you do, little Oliver or Abigail won't end up a doctor or lawyer — or, indeed, an you've ever heard of. According to Cathy N. Davidson, co-director of the annual MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning (C fully 65 percent of today's grade-school kids may end up doing work that hasn't been invented yet.

So Abigail won't be doing genetic counseling. Oliver won't be developing Android apps for currency traders or co-chairing Google's division. Even those digital-age careers will be old hat. Maybe the grown-up Oliver and Abigail will program Web-enabled barrettes (scraps of Berber tents. Or maybe they'll be plying a trade none of us old-timers will even recognize as work.

For those two-thirds of grade-school kids, if for no one else, it's high time we redesigned American education.

As Ms. Davidson puts it: "Pundits may be asking if the Internet is bad for our children's mental development, but the better question form of learning and knowledge-making we are instilling in our children is useful to their future."

In her galvanic new book, "Now You See It," Ms. Davidson asks, and ingeniously answers, that question. One of the nation's great she has written an immensely enjoyable omni-manifesto that's officially about the brain science of attention. But the book also cha every assumption about American education.

Don't worry: She doesn't conclude that students should study Photoshop instead of geometry, or Linux instead of Pax Romana. W recommends, in fact, looks much more like a classical education than it does the industrial-era holdover system that still informs o classrooms.

Simply put, we can't keep preparing students for a world that doesn't exist. We can't keep ignoring the formidable cognitive skills th on their own. And above all, we must stop disparaging digital prowess just because some of us over 40 don't happen to possess it grudge match with the young can sabotage an entire culture.

When we criticize students for making digital videos instead of reading "Gravity's Rainbow," or squabbling on Politico.com instead (Candidate," we are blinding ourselves to the world as it is. And then we're punishing students for our blindness. Those hallowed art Thomas Pynchon novel and the Michael Ritchie film — had a place in earlier social environments. While they may one day resurfa

they are now chiefly of interest to cultural historians. But digital video and Web politics are intellectually robust and stimulating, prof pleasurable.

The contemporary American classroom, with its grades and deference to the clock, is an inheritance from the late 19th century. Du of titanic change, machines suddenly needed to run on time. Individual workers needed to willingly perform discrete operations as c jobs. The industrial-era classroom, as a training ground for future factory workers, was retooled to teach tasks, obedience, hierarch schedules.

That curriculum represented a dramatic departure from earlier approaches to education. In “Now You See It,” Ms. Davidson cites th system of questions and answers, the agrarian method of problem-solving and the apprenticeship program of imitating a master. It that *any* of these educational approaches would be more appropriate to the digital era than the one we have now.

To take an example of just one classroom convention that might be inhibiting today’s students: Teachers and professors regularly write papers. Semester after semester, year after year, “papers” are styled as the highest form of writing. And semester after seme and professors are freshly appalled when they turn up terrible.

Ms. Davidson herself was appalled not long ago when her students at Duke, who produced witty and incisive blogs for their peers, t disgraceful, unpublishable term papers. But instead of simply carping about students with colleagues in the great faculty-lounge tra Davidson questioned the whole form of the research paper. “What if bad writing is a product of the form of writing required in school paper — and not necessarily intrinsic to a student’s natural writing style or thought process?” She adds: “What if ‘research paper’ i invites, even requires, linguistic and syntactic gobbledygook?”

What if, indeed. After studying the matter, Ms. Davidson concluded, “Online blogs directed at peers exhibit fewer typographical and less plagiarism, and generally better, more elegant and persuasive prose than classroom assignments by the same writers.”

In response to this and other research and classroom discoveries, Ms. Davidson has proposed various ways to overhaul schoolworl testing. Her recommendations center on one of the most astounding revelations of the digital age: Even academically reticent studu prolifically, subject it to critique and improve it on the Internet. This goes for everything from political commentary to still photograph videos — all the stuff that parents and teachers habitually read as “distraction.”

A classroom suited to today’s students should deemphasize solitary piecework. It should facilitate the kind of collaboration that he compensate for their blindnesses, instead of cultivating them. That classroom needs new ways of measuring progress, tailored to c rather than to the industrial age or to some artsy utopia where everyone gets an Awesome for effort.

The new classroom should teach the huge array of complex skills that come under the heading of digital literacy. And it should ma accountable on the Web, where they should regularly be aiming, from grade-school on, to contribute to a wide range of wiki project

As scholarly as “Now You See It” is — as rooted in field experience, as well as rigorous history, philosophy and science — this bo education happens to double as an optimistic, even thrilling, summer read. It supplies reasons for hope about the future. Take it to much hope, plus that much scholarship, amounts to a distinctly unguilty pleasure.

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Overriding a Key Education Law

New York Times

By: Sam Dillon

August 8, 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/08/education/08educ.html?_r=3&ref=education

Secretary of Education [Arne Duncan](#) has announced that he will unilaterally override the centerpiece requirement of the [No Child Le](#) accountability law, that 100 percent of students be proficient in math and reading by 2014.

Mr. Duncan told reporters that he was acting because Congress had failed to rewrite the Bush-era law, which he called a “slow-mo He is waiving the law’s proficiency requirements for states that have adopted their own testing and accountability programs and are strides toward better schools, he said.

The administration’s plan amounts to the most sweeping use of executive authority to rewrite federal education law since Washingt involvement in education in the 1960s.

Conservatives said it could inflame relations with Republicans in the House who want to reduce, not expand, the federal footprint in Mr. Duncan and White House officials described their plan as offering crucial relief to state and local educators as the No Child law President George W. Bush signed in 2002, comes into increasing conflict with more recent efforts to raise academic standards.

The law made its focus the use of standardized test scores in schools, particularly those serving minority students.

“I can’t overemphasize how loud the outcry is for us to do something right now,” Mr. Duncan told reporters on Friday in a conferenc said could not be reported until midnight Sunday.

Melody Barnes, director of President Obama's White House Domestic Policy Council, who joined Mr. Duncan in the announcement states would be encouraged to apply for waivers from the law's accountability provisions, but that only states the administration believes carrying out ambitious school improvement initiatives would get them.

"This is not a pass on accountability," Ms. Barnes said. "There will be a high bar for states seeking flexibility within the law."

Under the current law, every school is given the equivalent of a pass-fail report card each year, an evaluation that administration often differentiates among chaotic schools in chronic failure, schools that are helping low-scoring students improve, and high-performing schools that nonetheless appear to be neglecting some low-scoring students.

About 38,000 of the nation's 100,000 public schools fell short of their test-score targets under the federal law last year, and Mr. Duncan predicted that number would rise to 80,000 this year.

Skeptics said Mr. Duncan's predictions were exaggerated, but a huge number of schools are falling short under No Child's school. Eighty-nine percent of Florida's public schools, for instance, missed federal testing targets, although 58 percent of Florida schools under the state's own well-regarded grading system.

When Mr. Duncan sketched an outline of the administration's waiver plan in June, Representative John Kline, the Minnesota Republican chairman of the House education committee, demanded that Mr. Duncan show by what legal authority he would override the federal law. Duncan responded by citing provisions of the No Child law itself that give the education secretary broad waiver powers.

On Friday, Mr. Kline said in a statement, "I remain concerned that temporary measures instituted by the department, such as condoning, could undermine" efforts by Congress to rewrite the law.

Mr. Kline's committee has completed three overhaul bills focusing on elimination of federal programs, financial flexibility for states, and [schools](#). But the committee has not yet produced bills rewriting the law's crucial school accountability and teacher effectiveness provisions.

Senator Tom Harkin, the Iowa Democrat who is chairman of the Senate education committee, said he understood why Mr. Duncan would support a waiver plan, since "it is undeniable that this Congress faces real challenges reaching bipartisan, bicameral agreement on anything."

The No Child Left Behind law is the latest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a 1965 law that over the years has become the main federal law on public schools. It has been rewritten in ways that have allowed nearly every president since its original architect, Lyndon Johnson, to put his policy stamp on it, usually in the first term. That has eluded President Obama so far, despite his campaign pledge to fix the law's flaws.

In Friday's conference call, Mr. Duncan and Ms. Barnes said the [Department of Education](#) would issue guidelines next month inviting states to apply for the waivers. For a waiver to be approved, they said, states would need to show that they were adopting higher standards and that school students were "college- and career-ready" at graduation, were working to improve teacher effectiveness and evaluation systems, that student test scores and other measures, were overhauling the lowest-performing schools, and were adopting locally designed school systems to replace No Child's pass-fail system.

Those requirements match the criteria the administration used last year in picking winning states in its two-stage Race to the Top competition. Ms. Barnes said states would not be competing against one another with their waiver applications. But the similarity in requirements is striking.

"It sounds like they're trying to do a backdoor Round 3 of Race to the Top, and that's astonishing," said Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute. He called Mr. Duncan's plan "a dramatically broad reading of executive authority."

The plan appears likely to gain broad support from state education officials, however. More than a dozen states have already asked for changes to their No Child school accountability plans, or are about to do so, said Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the [Council on School Officers](#). "Many states feel that we need major changes in the law, because it's identifying such an outlandish number of schools as failing and losing credibility," he said.

The law allowed states to adopt local academic standards and determine their own passing scores on tests after it took effect in 2002. A requirement that 100 percent of students be proficient in math and reading by 2014 encouraged lower standards, which made it easier for students to score as proficient. Since early 2010, however, more than 40 states have agreed to adopt higher standards, and the 2002 law complicating their efforts, Mr. Duncan said.

In Tennessee, for instance, 91 percent of students scored at or above the proficient level in math under the state's old standards, but when tougher standards adopted recently, the proportion plummeted to 34 percent.

"The current law serves as a disincentive to higher standards, rather than as an incentive," Mr. Duncan said.

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Finding that vouchers have little impact on student achievement do not deter advocates

Philadelphia Inquirer

By: Dan Hardy

August 8, 2011

http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20110808_Finding_that_vouchers_have_little_impact_on_student_achievement_do_not_dete

A national education policy center says there was "no clear, positive impact on student academic achievement" for pupils who use publicly funded voucher programs to transfer to private schools.

The analysis by Center on Education Policy in Washington, which calls itself an advocate for public education, does not explain why those who used the vouchers made little or no academic improvement compared to their public school counterparts during the 10 years of research.

One of the study's authors, Nancy Kober, said in an interview: "All I can say is that the notion that private schools are better than public schools is not borne out by this data when you weight for socioeconomic factors."

As Pennsylvania legislators debate several voucher proposals, the center's finding is being cited by opponents.

Voucher supporters dispute the conclusion and say other factors, such as school safety and parents' desire for more educational choices, justify the proposed laws.

Nationwide, there are seven voucher programs; two cover entire states; the rest, specific counties or cities. A statewide Florida program was struck down by the courts in 2006.

Legislation proposed in Harrisburg would give state money to low-income students, including those already in private schools, to help them attend public schools.

Several other voucher proposals have also been put forward. The legislature recessed for the summer without acting on the measures.

In New Jersey, the focus has been on a proposal giving tax credits to businesses donating money to help low-income students in low-income schools attend schools outside their districts.

At several recent legislative meetings airing voucher plans, critics mentioned the Center for Education Policy study or similar reports.

At a House Education Committee informational meeting late last month in Philadelphia, for example, Rep. Mark Longietti (D., Mercer County) said he was going to spend lots of money on vouchers. " . . . we need to see results. . . . Why should we invest in a program when in other states, the data's clearly saying, 'It's not working?' "

Voucher advocate Matthew Brouillette, head of the conservative Commonwealth Foundation, responded in an interview last week at a state Senate Democratic Policy Committee school-choice discussion.

"Academic gains is certainly a big driving component of this, but at the end of the day, this should be about parents choosing what is best for their children or a safer school for their children," he said.

Brouillette cited other research showing academic gains for voucher students. "At the very least, [vouchers in other states have] saved money and we've allowed parents to have an alternative to their assigned public schools," he said.

The center's study, released in late July, looked at research since 2000 on public voucher programs. It said: "While some studies have shown limited test score gains for voucher students in certain subject areas or grade levels, these findings are inconsistent among studies. Some are either not statistically significant, not clearly caused by vouchers, or not sustained in the long run."

Robert Enlow, head of the pro-voucher Foundation for Educational Choice, disputes that, saying studies of privately funded voucher programs included in the report showed voucher students making some academic gains.

He added that competition from voucher programs had pushed public schools to improve and some studies showed higher voucher student graduation rates.

The center reported those findings but said they were less conclusive than its main one, "because they were supported by fewer studies and could not be clearly attributed to vouchers, or were based on self-reports."

Whoever is right, the voucher movement remains fueled by parents who believe their children are trapped in substandard public schools and want an alternative.

At the Senate Democratic hearing, Annemarie Smith of Northeast Philadelphia, a divorced mother of two, told the panel the middle child is to attend in the fall "has a horrible reputation." He is on the waiting list for several charters, she said, and "I can't afford Catholic. Somebody has to help me."

No one offered an immediate solution, though some panel members talked to Smith after the meeting. "The silence is deafening," I said. "and that is the problem."

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FLORIDA NEWS

Coming to Brevard classrooms near you: The iPad

Florida Today

By: Michelle Spitzer

August 6, 2011

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20110807/NEWS13/108070331/Coming-Brevard-classrooms-near-you-iPad>

Teachers, parents, kids give tablet computers a thumbs-up

In preparation for the first day of school Wednesday, Shannon Rennemann bought two big backpacks that are ready to be stuffed a down with her 10-year-old twins' heavy textbooks.

She's hoping this is a back-to-school activity that won't be around much longer.

Rennemann's daughters are entering fifth grade at Quest Elementary in Viera, one of the few schools in the district that have multiple iPads available for student use.

"It's amazing because to them it's not learning, it's playing," Rennemann said about the iPads. "There are so many things they could do that could totally eliminate textbooks."

Rennemann understands that may still be a few years away, but it's the direction schools are headed. Florida wants to see all public school districts make that transition from paper to digital by 2015. In other words, textbooks likely will become a thing of the past, replaced by tablet computers.

They're interactive and offer a more dynamic, multimedia experience, said Matt Frey, manager of educational training and customer support for Brevard Public Schools.

"That is the direction we know we need to accommodate to become an entirely digital curriculum," he said.

Over the summer, Brevard Public Schools purchased 150 iPads -- the clear favorite among tablets -- for teachers. A third were paid for with state money while the rest were purchased using about \$50,000 in instructional technology funds. At least one teacher at every school received an iPad.

Quest Principal Elia Lea thought it was so important to have iPads available for her students and didn't want to let budget restraints stop her. So her school raised money through bake sales and fundraisers, including one event where a teacher took 125 pies in the face. That event provided a sizeable donation that allowed the school to purchase 21 iPads midway through the last school year.

"We want them in every classroom as soon as possible," Lea said. "I wish I had more money to put toward them, but it will come."

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Lee, Collier county schools up effort in STEM education

Florida News Press

By: Kris Umpierre

August 6, 2011

<http://www.news-press.com/article/20110807/NEWS0104/110806017/Lee-Collier-county-schools-up-effort-STEM-education>

It's no longer good enough just to be proficient in reading, writing and arithmetic.

Knowledge of science, technology, engineering and math is critical for future success, a recent U.S. Department of Commerce report said.

STEM careers pay better and offer more job security than non-STEM jobs because of higher international demand for those workers, the report said.

President Barack Obama wants the United States to add 100,000 STEM teachers in the next 10 years, and the Lee and Collier school districts are working to shift more resources to STEM. But the effort seems to be fragmented as only a dozen of Lee's 117 schools and Collier's 100 schools have a STEM focus.

What's more, the curriculum hasn't produced lofty results, as Lee and Collier's students scored below the state average in standard algebra 1 and 11th grade science tests last year. Lee and Collier had average scores of 48 and 49, respectively, out of 80 on the algebra 1 test. And 35 percent of Lee's juniors and 37 percent of Collier's juniors met the state's science standard.

As schools start the new year this month, Lee and Collier plan to use some of their federal Race to the Top grants — Lee received \$4 million — to bolster their STEM programs. Race to the Top provides funding to school districts that deliver reforms to improve performance and boost success in failing schools.

"If we're going to compete in a global society, our students need to be prepared in STEM," said Sue Roshon, Lee's technical education director. "STEM is a big emphasis in countries like China and India, and we have to make it an emphasis here, too."

Richard Lewis, the principal shareholder of the Fort Myers branch of HSA Engineers and Scientists, believes school districts should way they teach STEM by including more hands-on experiences for students.

“Maybe we bring in more businesses for partnerships, and we open the classroom up a little bit,” Lewis said. “The idea is we want kids’ minds without putting them to sleep.

“Because if you don’t have an uncle or a father involved in STEM, you don’t know about it.”

Fractured curriculum

The Lee and Collier school districts have about a dozen schools known for STEM, but not all schools have the same programs.

Fort Myers’ Dunbar High, for instance, is known as Lee’s top technological school. The world’s first Microsoft certified school, Dunt academies for technology excellence, digital excellence and game design. The academies don’t exist at Lee’s other 12 high schools.

Cape Coral’s Island Coast High and Mariner High are known for their academy of natural resources and biomedical science class, respectively.

In Collier, which starts classes Aug. 22, East Naples Middle is the lone school to offer Gateway to Technology — a national project that feeds students to Naples High’s Engineering Academy.

“Do I think we need to increase our STEM programs? Yes, I do,” said Dale Johnson, Collier’s supervisor of career and technical education, “going to make every effort to meet the needs of our students as education changes.”

In Lee, which starts classes Monday, incoming ninth graders must earn 24 credits to graduate. The credited courses cover math and not technology and engineering. The required credits are: four math courses (including algebra 1 and geometry), four English, three social studies, one fine or performing arts, one physical education and eight electives.

Interesting kids

Lewis, a 20-year environmental engineer, admits it’s difficult getting students interested in STEM because the careers aren’t heavily advertised.

“Homer Simpson is the only engineer on TV,” said Lewis, referring to the popular TV show, “The Simpsons.”

“Homer’s a nuclear engineer,” he said, “and it’s a farce, but that’s what kids see. (Real) engineers need to be included in education so they understand that science is not just about adding things to test tubes.

“There’s a reason for adding things to test tubes, and it generally requires a lot of creativity.”

The Foundation for Lee County Public Schools and the Lee school district ran two new STEM events last year. In March, Lee held STEMtastic Showcase Fair where 1,000 students unveiled STEM projects.

Also in March, the foundation used a \$4,000 grant from AT&T to fund a new STEM to Work program. About 40 students from Ida B. Wells Fort Myers High visited construction companies, FGCU and other sites to get a first-hand perspective of engineering.

The students learned that STEM workers earn 26 percent more than non-STEM employees. The average salary for STEM occupations according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Science whiz

Fort Myers High junior Samantha Prabakaran said a hands-on experience helped get her interested in science. Prabakaran, 15, credits her participation in the annual Edison Inventors Fair.

This year, Prabakaran won the senior division of the Florida State Science Fair. Her project tested diabetic vascular disease.

“I believe that schools should do more to improve the science curriculum and to encourage students to study the sciences,” Prabakaran said. “Students should be recognized and rewarded just as much for achieving scientific excellence as they do for attaining athletic prowess.”

Prabakaran said science taught her how to question and test new theories.

“I’m always asking why things work,” said Prabakaran, who wants to be a physician.

Prabakaran and her classmates are working on projects to build solar-powered ovens.

Susan Blanchard, the director for FGCU’s School of Engineering, is thrilled about the local STEM activity.

In 2005, she found that 70 percent of FGCU’s engineering students weren’t ready for calculus 1 — the entry level math requirement for the program. FGCU helped to bring those students up to speed by integrating their labs and lectures.

“I’d like to see STEM education integrated at all levels so students can talk about concepts and they are all related and linked.

“It’s about creating more open-ended learning,” Blanchard said. “Here’s a problem and now, how do you go about solving it?”

Using technology

Brian Botts, principal at Edison Collegiate High School in south Fort Myers, believes schools should use more technology in their classrooms to pique students' interest in STEM.

This year, Edison will be the first Lee school to use iPads in the classroom. Edison will give an iPad to each of its 100 sophomores.

The charter school, which has a STEM-focused curriculum, received a state Department of Education start-up grant to purchase the iPads, which cost about \$499 apiece.

"Information is always changing," Botts said. "You need to know it, evaluate it, apply it, reject it. And the lag time of creating a textbook so the information is five years old by the time kids get it."

Technology helped Juliana Toyloy-Stanton. The Dunbar High junior learned how to excel in Microsoft Powerpoint, and the technology helped her analytical skills for other subjects.

"My mom is from Trinidad, and she didn't have these types of opportunities, so I'm grateful for my participation in the Academy for Excellence at Dunbar," said Toyloy-Stanton, who wants to pursue a career in video game art and design.

STEM criticism

But not everybody supports the national and local push for STEM. Some educators believe the arts should be included and that the acronym be amended to STEAM.

"Personally, I think the arts is critical," said Johnson of Collier schools. "If you're not a creative person, where are you going to get to solve problems. It's not all mathematics. It's a lot of creative thinking."

Others believe schools should not prioritize STEM over reading. Just 38 percent of Lee's high school sophomores met the state's reading level in 2011.

"It's really hard to say what is most important," Johnson said. "We're preparing kids to do things that don't exist today."

Integrate community

Lewis' engineering company has formed a partnership with the Foundation for Lee County Public Schools, the Southwest Florida Commerce, the Fort Myers Imaginarium and the Florida Engineering Society to promote STEM.

The group recently secured a \$35,000 grant from a private national foundation to take a third-grade teacher from each of Lee's 44 elementary schools to Boston's Museum of Science. The teachers were trained on hands-on STEM projects, such as getting

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Large wave of charter school applications hits Pasco

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeffrey S. Solochek

August 6, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/large-wave-of-charter-school-applications-hits-pasco/1184637>

The district receives 11 applications. The resulting paperwork draws a warning.

LAND O'LAKES - Nancy Scowcroft had expected maybe seven applications to open charter schools in Pasco County for the 2012-13 school year.

Her office received 11 by the Aug. 1 deadline.

The spate of applications filled her small portable office with so much paperwork that the fire marshal issued a warning to get the county district reviewers as soon as possible.

"He said there wasn't enough walkway for people if they had to get out," said Scowcroft, district charter school supervisor.

The most charter applicants that Pasco has seen at one time before was six. Currently, five are open in the district, which has about 10,000 students.

That relative lack of charter schools is what inspired Charter Schools USA, one of the state's largest charter operators, to put in a proposal for a K-6 school for up to 862 students in the first year. The company applied on behalf of one of its local boards, which runs two schools in Hillsborough County.

"They asked us to look at areas where there is a lot of demand," Charter Schools USA chief executive Jon Hage said. "Pasco does not have a lot of charter schools. ... That area has had a growing amount of interest."

The company is applying under the state's new high-performing school law, which allows charter schools with strong past performance an easier path to approval for additional locations. The model is Keys Gate Charter in Homestead, which has earned A's and B's from the system since opening.

Mike Kooi, executive director of the Department of Education's school choice office, said he expected to see many charter school applications this year under the new law. He stressed that the rules do not take away a local district's right to closely review the application and even a denial must have solid documentation to be upheld at the state level.

Several other existing management organizations, including Miami-based Academica, Plant City-based Freedom Schools and K12 (a national education provider) have submitted charter requests, as well.

Local groups make up the bulk of the difference.

They include various applications from a charter school teacher, the wife of state Rep. Richard Corcoran and two district teachers concerned about autism.

"We felt like they need more services," said teacher Jami Crumley, who has proposed opening the Pasco County Center for Autism. Her colleague, speech clinician Jennifer Moore. "We felt like we could provide that through a charter school."

The women have consulted with finance experts while also taking courses in school leadership in the time leading up to their projects. Crumley said many parents have indicated a desire to send their children to a program that can do more than traditional schools, including before- and after-school care and summer courses.

The Center for Independence also proposed a small school for a targeted population: It would serve about a dozen students, ages 14-18, who have disabilities and qualify for public education beyond traditional high school age.

Because the district has so many proposals to go through, Scowcroft said, she is asking all applicants to extend the 60-day response period set forth in law. Most have agreed. The schools are aiming to open in the fall of 2012 or later.

"Our plan is to have this to the board for action by the 15th of November," she said.

Until then, district staff will review the applications, starting with the "really key areas" such as finances.

"I can tell quickly if there are any problems," Scowcroft said.

It is not likely that all of the schools will be approved. The School Board has not authorized a new charter school since Imagine Schools in 2008.

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STATE NEWS

Tennessee: Scores slightly higher in non-bargaining districts

Associated Press

By: Erik Schelzig

August 7, 2011

<http://www.wmctv.com/story/15224395/scores-slightly-higher-in-non-bargaining-districts>

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - An Associated Press analysis of student testing data shows Tennessee school systems without teacher bargaining rights performed slightly better than those with negotiated contracts, but posted weaker gains.

Thirty-eight of the state's 135 local school districts did not engage in collective bargaining with their teachers before a new law eliminated bargaining rights this year, according to the Tennessee Education Association.

Those districts averaged a higher percentage of students earning proficient or advanced scores in the four categories tested. The largest gain was in math, where non-bargaining districts averaged 3.5 percentage points higher than the rest of the districts, while social science scores were just a half percentage point apart.

But the districts that allowed collective bargaining - which included the state's four largest cities - averaged larger gains in all four categories compared with last year's scores.

The mostly Republican supporters of a new law that replaced collective bargaining rights with a concept called "collaborative conferencing" argued that the move put a priority on teacher performance over workplace issues.

But Democrats and the state's largest teachers' union characterized the legislation as a politically motivated attack.

"The data clearly shows that those legislators who said the repeal of collective bargaining would improve student achievement were misinformed or trying to disguise their real motives," said Tennessee Education Association lobbyist Jerry Winters.

"There is little doubt that repealing the collective bargaining law had very little if anything to do with education reform but a lot to do

Sen. Jack Johnson, R-Franklin and the main sponsor of the collective bargaining repeal, said test scores alone were not the reason to make the change. He said the main goal was to reduce the "hostility between the school boards and the teachers that are union members."

"Removing the exclusivity of the unions to have negotiating rights on the part of teachers means you can have more effective and more communication between teachers and school boards," he said. "And you're going to get a better outcome."

Republicans criticized the TEA for overwhelmingly supporting Democratic candidates but have denied that the new law was retributive fundraising snub.

Senate Minority Leader Jim Kyle of Memphis said the best teachers are motivated ones, and that Republican legislative efforts have demoralized educators.

"We have damaged education and we have damaged the morale of teachers," Kyle said. "That's what we're hearing from the people who work."

Republican Gov. Bill Haslam sought to remain neutral on the collective bargaining measure during the session while focusing on his other initiatives, such as lifting a cap on charter schools and making teacher tenure more difficult to obtain. He ultimately signed the collective bargaining measure into law.

Haslam was asked by reporters last month whether the overall improvement in student test scores called into question the need for education initiatives passed this year. The governor said he was pleased with the better scores but stressed that the state needs to do better.

"Obviously, I think the key things that were passed in the Legislature ... are important for keeping us on a trajectory," he said. "What the discussion should always be about is what's the best thing for the child."

"We should realize that we are making progress, but we're not where we need to be."

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Analysis: NY Schools Taking on Landmark Change

Associated Press

By: Michael Gormley

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The few doors that are open at Shaker High School are meant to allow in only a summer breeze. Desks are stacked in the hallway and are scrubbed clean, the halls eerily quiet.

But at this high-performing school in suburban Albany and other schools across New York, intense work is under way in the offices of principals and superintendents. There, the face of New York's public school system is changing, perhaps more than at any point in its 199-year history.

By the time students return to class in September, some old school traditions and methods will be changed or threatened, from mandatory fire drills, to second-guessing school professionals, to forcing consideration of program cuts that could include kindergarten.

In Albany, where the political will for more than a decade was to provide record state aid increases even as local taxes grew at more than 5 percent inflation, the political will now is to control what have become some of the nation's highest property taxes, and risk the wrath of the teachers unions.

"The gravitational forces are moving toward performance and refocusing on students and achievement," Gov. Andrew Cuomo told The Associated Press. "The gravitational forces are moving away from growing the bureaucracy. I'm going to push very hard on that going forward ... to be on improving student performance."

But what Cuomo sees as a progressive approach to education is viewed as a "hostage-terrorist approach" by the head of the New York State Teachers union.

NYSUT President Richard Iannuzzi faces a confluence of unfunded school accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind begun by President George W. Bush, teacher accountability mandates, hundreds more privately run charter schools under President Barack Obama, the Top funding competition, and a powerful Cuomo.

"It's a conservative, right-wing agenda that is using a sort of hostage-terrorist approach to public service," said Iannuzzi of NYSUT,

largest teachers union and for decades a powerful force with the Legislature.

“Unfortunately, a lot of progressive-minded politicians are feeling that they should be engaged in appeasement,” he said. “We have learned from history: When you appease terrorists you get more terrorism. That’s what we’re seeing.”

When school resumes in New York:

— School boards will have developed the first job evaluations for teachers and administrators that will include student performance. Teachers and principals with a pattern of “ineffective” ratings could face termination through an expedited process.

— School boards will begin to look at a list of non-mandated fixtures in schools for possible budget cuts, including whether to have elementary schools, elective classes for top students, music, art, sports and even kindergarten. Those traditional offerings will be cut as schools plan for their first budgets under a new law that caps local property tax growth to 2 percent, or inflation, whichever is less.

— Cuomo’s competition-based funding will begin. School districts will for the first time have to compete for funding, \$250 million in budget, based on classroom performance and innovative efficiencies.

— State Education Commissioner John B. King Jr. will issue new regulations to crack down on cheating by teachers, administrators on standardized tests following several scandals nationwide.

“I think what we are seeing is a seismic shift in kindergarten through 12th grade education in New York state,” said B. Jason Brooks of the Brookings Foundation for Education Reform & Accountability, an advocacy group that has spent years lobbying for what he agrees is a new era of schools.

“We are part of a large national movement and this is great to see for a change,” Brooks said.

While Brooks and Cuomo look forward to a new era of accountability and waste-cutting, advocates including Maria Fletcher, a parent activist, foresee a chilled September.

“Is this a change in education? I believe so,” said Fletcher of Valley Stream on Long Island, mother of three children who attended public schools and president of the New York State Parent Teacher Association.

“I know there are districts thinking of eliminating or cutting kindergarten programs, maybe going to a half-day,” Fletcher said. “What’s going backwards.”

In April, Cuomo and the Legislature agreed to an historic cut in school aid of 3.5 percent, that after two years of flat state spending already forced spending cuts and some layoffs in schools. As part of the package, Cuomo and the Legislature agreed to an \$800 million increase in the state’s school aid for the 2012-13 fiscal year. But that remains billions behind the state’s commitment under a high court ruling that has left underfunded schools for decades.

New York spends \$20 billion a year in school aid, one of the highest in the nation, in a \$132 billion annual budget.

Schools will become far more dependent on that state aid because the property tax cap will restrict levies unless districts can muster approval in budget votes to suspend it.

“The paradigm has changed,” said David Albert of the New York State School Boards Association. “It’s no longer about expenses and about tax levies. It’s about, ‘How much are you going to be able to raise?’ Not, ‘How much are you going to spend on education?’”

That could force school boards to turn to a list of programs not required by the state to eliminate, or share with other districts or the BOCES. It includes elementary school librarians, advanced programs for top students, music, art, athletics, nurses in every school even kindergarten, which still isn’t required in New York.

“I am really so concerned and passionate about this,” said Fletcher, holding her 7-month-old grandson, Robert, gurgling as she speaks. “We are competing not only for jobs in the state, but nationally. It’s very short-sighted.”

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