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FLORIDA NEWS

Is Florida the "reformiest" of them all?

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeff Solochek

August 4, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/florida-reformiest-them-all>

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, run by former Reagan Administration education official Chester Finn, is known for its partiality to education initiatives that change the status quo. Things like those pushed by Florida under Jeb Bush and his successors.

Now the Institute has a question: Which state is the "reformiest"?

It has pitted Florida against Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio and Illinois for [Education Reform Idol 2011](#). Each state has a spokesperson -- ours is Patricia Levesque -- to make the case for why its efforts are the best. Then at 8:30 a.m. Thursday Aug. 11 (that's a week from today) the group will have an online event, with voters getting to choose the reformiest state.

To make Florida's case, Levesque [cites as example No. 1](#) the passage of Senate Bill 736. But that's not all. She also writes about the state's new digital learning law, its effort to drop barriers for charter schools and its expansion of voucher programs.

"Florida is an education-reform leader. But we believe success is never final, so reform is never finished. So, this year, Florida leaders took dramatic steps to further improve the quality of public education. Our state challenged conventionalities, advanced bold reforms, and fought to bring our students the learning experience they deserve."

See the [arguments made by the representatives from the other states](#), too. Then you decide. Is Florida the reformiest of them all?

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Flagler school officials get accounting on race, gender disparities

Daytona-Beach News Journal

By: Annie Martin

August 5, 2011

<http://www.news-journalonline.com/news/local/flagler/2011/08/05/flagler-school-officials-get-accounting-on-race-gender-disparities.html>

BUNNELL -- Flagler County students are signing up for high-level classes in greater numbers than they did five years ago.

Still, black students are less likely than their white and Hispanic peers to take International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, honors and other high-level classes.

The Flagler County School Board discussed on Tuesday the school district's annual equity report, a state requirement that

includes the racial makeup of students and staff members and the gender of students who participate in sports.

Overall, more than a quarter of the district's high school students took high-level college preparatory courses last school year. That number was closer to 10 percent in 2006-2007, according to the data. The report includes only white, black and Hispanic students because the state doesn't require data about other racial groups, said Jim Devine, the district's coordinator for assessment, accountability and equity.

Blacks still lagged behind the other two groups. Boys also appeared to trail girls in all three racial groups. For example, less than a third of the white students who took the high-level classes were boys.

Those classes don't just help students get into college, they help them perform well once they get there, Devine said.

"The research shows, the more challenging classes students take in high school, the better opportunity they have to be successful in college," Devine said. "They get used to the rigor of these classes and that prepares them for the rigor of the college classroom."

Flagler County should increase the number of black and Hispanic students participating in those high-level classes by 2 percentage points next year, according to the report.

"When we look at new expectations for the coming year, to me, the percentages seemed low," School Board member Colleen Conklin said. "I just felt like we were setting our expectations low."

The report also showed disparities in the numbers of boys and girls participating in varsity sports, especially at Matanzas High School, where about 62 percent of the school's varsity athletes are boys. That's partly because the school doesn't have female weightlifters, Devine said.

The difference was smaller at Flagler Palm Coast High School, where a competitive cheerleading team was not allowed to count, which hurt the gender balance. Because the proportion of varsity girl athletes doesn't align with the percentage of students who are girls at those schools, the schools aren't in compliance with Title IX. That's a federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in school programs, including sports.

The report also covered the racial and gender make-up of the district's instructional and administrative staff, which is mostly white. Assistant principals were the most diverse group -- but 80 percent were white. The district also employs far more women than men as instructors and administrators. For example, of 419 elementary teachers, just 55 were men.

Superintendent Janet Valentine said the district is putting together a recruitment plan that may help the district attract a more diverse pool of applicants. Some School Board members said they'd like to keep working on some of the issues laid out in the report, including getting more students into advanced courses.

"I think the equity report needs to be with us throughout the entire year," Conklin said. "It needs to be an ongoing discussion."

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Pinellas' teacher training overhaul struggles to gain traction

St. Petersburg Times

By: Ron Matus

August 4, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/pinellas-teacher-training-overhaul-struggles-to-gain-traction/1184330>

Slow information flow adds to tensions over the teacher training partnership with UF.

One of Pinellas superintendent Julie Janssen's leading initiatives - creating a national model for teacher training - continued to come under fire Thursday, put in the crosshairs because of budget woes, tensions with School Board members and some of Janssen's own missteps.

Members peppered her at a special workshop with more questions about the district's direction, particularly with a much-hyped partnership with the University of Florida's Lastinger Center for Learning.

For weeks, they've asked for evidence that the venture is rubbing off on student achievement in high-poverty schools. But it wasn't until the workshop - more than a week after the board postponed a vote on two Lastinger contracts - that Janssen's administration offered a plan that outlined how it would evaluate the program in coming months.

"This is a good start ... but it would have been helpful if we saw this before we had the discussion at the board meeting," board member Linda Lerner said. "Again the board finds itself making important decisions ... without the basic information."

"This has been going on for three years," board member Terry Krassner said. (The partnership actually started in 2007.) "Where was this (evaluation plan) three years ago?"

It remains to be seen whether the Lastinger contracts will survive a board vote next week. But Janssen said after the workshop

that she hoped the additional information will get the project back on track.

"This piece is the heart and soul of what I believe is the right thing to do," she said.

Since becoming superintendent in fall 2008, Janssen has pushed to overhaul teacher training, both to jump-start anemic gains in student achievement, especially in poor schools, and put Pinellas back on the map as a forward-thinking district.

The idea has potential.

Other districts have overlooked professional development as they've grabbed flashier pieces of the teacher quality puzzle, like tenure or evaluations. Some experts say teacher training is ripe for reform. Many teachers are fans.

A recent flood of teacher e-mails to district offices reflects that. "Overwhelmingly, they're positive," board member Peggy O'Shea said.

But in the past two years, Janssen's lofty goal has been deflated by snags both big and small.

. In fall 2009, she recommended hiring Janet Hernandez, an acquaintance from graduate school, to head professional development. Accused of creating a climate of fear, Hernandez was removed in fall 2010 and resigned a few months later. But a state review of professional development in Pinellas concluded that leadership instability had a "significant negative impact" on the district's efforts.

. In February, if not earlier, School Board members began asking Janssen for details about the cost of the Lastinger partnership. The superintendent did not produce them for months. Now board members are left to consider whether they can afford to help 124 teachers earn master's degrees (a big chunk of the proposed \$1.6 million contracts) when 17,000 other district employees may be forced to take furloughs.

. In March, the state Department of Education issued its periodic review of professional development in Pinellas, but board members did not know about it until it was posted last week on the *St. Petersburg Times* education blog, the Gradebook. The overall results were mixed, but the reviewers - mostly officials from other school districts - gave Pinellas the lowest ratings possible on standards that relate to gauging the impact of professional development on student performance.

"To me, this is urgent," Lerner said, holding up a copy of the review. "We just can't keep working like this."

Janssen said the district has already responded in writing to the state's concerns. She said failure to get the board the state review was an oversight. "We won't let it happen again," she said.

She also said the professional development department - which has a new director, Lisa Grant, formerly the principal at Gulfport Elementary - is now poised to gain traction.

"I believe we have the structure in place," Janssen said.

The Lastinger partnership also got a plug Thursday from an influential group in the black community whose leaders strongly back Janssen.

The program benefits several predominantly black schools in St. Petersburg and should not be eliminated when it "may well be contributing to our positive direction," read a statement from the Concerned Organizations for Quality Education for Black Students.

Handed to board members by deputy superintendent Jim Madden, the statement mentioned recent legal agreements that are part of a long-running desegregation case.

"We fully understand that these are tight budget times," it said, "but the principles of equitable funding which run throughout the memoranda of understanding require that programs designed to benefit poor students and to reduce the effects of the racial achievement gap should not fall victim to the Board's other budget concerns."

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Opinion: Cheating scandal should be lesson for Florida

Sun Sentinel

By: Editorial Board

August 5, 2011

http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/opinion/editorials/os-cheating-editorial-0722-20110805.0_1587639.story

ISSUE: Cheating scandal a warning to Florida.

A national school reform movement that's increasingly built upon high-stakes testing was rocked by revelations that educators at nearly half of Atlanta's public schools cheated on Georgia's standardized tests.

Since 2001, Atlanta teachers manipulated the state's Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests — Georgia's FCAT. All told, 180 educators at 44 schools were implicated.

It's a gross breach of trust that camouflaged the schools' real progress and robbed untold students of an honest accounting of where they stood.

Elsewhere, educators wagged fingers. Yet, it was hard to ignore the irony: the shocking lapse of accountability given that holding students, teachers and schools accountable is the soul of high-stakes testing.

Wrongheaded skeptics rationalized that the pressure to hit ever-rising testing benchmarks — or face poor evaluations or pink slips — invites cheating. As if job stress absolves educators who hoodwink the system.

Atlanta's disgrace ought to be a shot across Florida's bow — a warning to batten down the hatches to thwart gaming the FCAT.

Researchers from Harvard and the University of Chicago recently concluded that educator-cheating on standardized tests plagues a minimum of 4 to 5 percent of elementary school classrooms every year.

Scattered incidents of cheating have also darkened the Sunshine State.

To its credit, Florida has vigorously gone after cheating. Already known for one of the nation's more aggressive whistle-blower systems, the state this year added a data audit to sniff out misconduct. The forensic analysis flagged 14 districts statewide for "extremely unusual levels" of erasures on some FCAT tests.

Solid tools — after the fact.

That's why Kris Ellington, deputy commissioner for accountability, research and measurement with the state Department of Education, says the department's now beefing up preemptive measures, such as anti-cheating webinars for district and school staffers. Students will sign an honor code included in their 2012 test books, while test proctors will autograph a best-practices procedural sheet.

For their part, state officials must better communicate the consequences of cheating — an educator can face reprimands, permanent revocation of his or her educator's certificate, or misdemeanor charges for cheating on state assessments. And it makes sense to encourage districts to bar teachers from proctoring their own classrooms during standardized testing.

The state must ensure that educators desperate to hold onto their jobs don't cheat children out of their futures.

bottom line: Florida must thwart gaming on FCAT scores.

STATE NEWS

Opinion: DC test scores show momentum for charters

Washington Post

By Bill Turque

August 3, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/dc-schools-insider/post/test-scores-show-momentum-for-charters/2011/08/03/gIQAkbyMul_blog.html

The school-by-school 2011 DC CAS data [released Tuesday](#) tell a more revealing story than the aggregate numbers reported last month. Those figures showed DCPS elementary scores remaining essentially flat, with public charter schools producing modest but notable gains.

The school-level numbers sharpen the picture. While DCPS still shows more growth across the last five years, charters produced the more encouraging results in 2011.

Forty-four of the 76 charter campuses (58 percent) tested registered improvement in at least one category (reading or math). My reading of the DCPS data shows just 47 of 123 schools (38 percent) in the same bucket. Another 42 DCPS schools lost ground in both reading and math, with ten suffering double-digit declines in the percentage of students who pass.

Among the big elementary charter successes are Achievement Prep in Ward 8, where 87 percent of students scored proficient or better in math and 60 percent in reading. That surpasses any traditional public elementary school in Ward 8—even though Achievement Prep's reading score dropped 18 percentage points from 2010. Same for Two Rivers in Ward 6, which reached 78 percent in reading and 68 in math.

(Note: Scores are expressed as the percentage of students who pass, meaning they reached proficient or better.)

Two public charter high schools in Ward 8, KIPP D.C. College Prep (77 in reading, 92 in math) and Thurgood Marshall Academy (67 in reading, 75 in math), bested not only all D.C. high schools east of the river but the city's top open enrollment high school, Woodrow Wilson (66 in reading and 52 in math) in Ward 3.

At the middle school level, DC Prep's Edgewood campus in Ward 5 reached 92 in math, better than any of the top three DCPS middle schools, Deal (Ward 3), Hardy (Ward 2) and Hobson (Ward 6). Washington Latin Middle School (Ward 4), at 83.9, is in a

virtual tie with Deal (83.4) for the highest reading pass rate.

There were some positive signs on the DCPS side. Twenty-six schools showed gains in both reading and math. Two high schools—Ellington (Ward 2) and Phelps (Ward 5)—and Columbia Heights (Ward 1) and Francis-Stevens (Ward 2) education campuses produced double-digit growth in both categories. Bruce-Monroe Elementary at Park View (Ward 1) which has struggled to implement [Singapore math](#), produced a 20-point bump in math scores. There is also some daylight at Hart Middle School in Ward 8, which saw gains of eight points in reading and 14 in math.

But some schools continue to post abysmal numbers. At Stanton Elementary in Ward 8, where DCPS brought in Philadelphia charter organization [Scholar Academies](#) as an operator, scores were in single digits in reading (9 percent). They didn't have far to drop, since proficiency was 13 percent in 2010. Only 9 percent of the 135 Stanton students tested were proficient or better in math, essentially unchanged from 2010. Scholar Academies, incidentally, has received authorization to open a charter school in Ward 8 in 2012.

Also in the single-digit club is Garfield Elementary (Ward 8) where 8 percent of students read proficient or better, down from 19 percent in 2010, and 6 percent passed math, down from 16 in 2010.

Other schools took significant tumbles. At Coolidge HS (Ward 4), run by [Friends of Bedford](#) under contract with the city, scores fell sharply (math by 17 points, reading by 15 points). Math scores at Houston Elementary in Ward 8 dropped 35 points, to 21 percent. At Ferebee-Hope Elementary (Ward 8) where the principal resigned in the middle of the year, math and reading both fell by 20 points, bringing reading proficiency to 11 percent and math to 12 percent.

Chancellor Kaya Henderson is out until Monday and was not available for comment. D.C. Council Chairman Kwame R. Brown (D) said in a statement:

"When I see a school that had only 16 percent of its students scoring proficient in reading last year, and then that same school went down to 6 percent (referring to Garfield) that's absolutely shocking. I hope that everyone in this city looks at this data very carefully – I know that I am – and is reminded that we have a great deal of work to do in order to build the schools that our students deserve."

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Indiana schools chief suggests grades for districts

Associated Press

By: Staff

August 4, 2011

<http://www.indystar.com/usatoday/article/37141347?odyssey=mod|newswell|text|News|s>

INDIANAPOLIS (WTW) — Indiana's state schools superintendent wants to start giving school districts letter grades on an A-to-F scale to hold them accountable for how their schools perform.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett made the suggestion Wednesday to the State Board of Education, which is expected this month to decide whether to back the first state takeover of troubled schools.

Five high schools and a middle school in the Indianapolis Public Schools district face possible takeover, with Roosevelt High School in Gary being the only other one on the state list.

Bennett said he believed district officials should answer for failing to help the schools escape probation.

"When you see the concentration like this at the corporation level, we should begin to move accountability to the corporation level," he said.

Individual public schools around the state this year will for the first time receive letter grades in a change by state officials from previous category designations such as "exemplary" or "probation."

Indianapolis schools Superintendent Eugene White said district leaders don't deserve all the blame for the troubled schools because the district faces high rates of students in poverty, homelessness and special education programs.

"You don't have to be a math major to look at 63 schools and deal with six schools on probation and figure out maybe it is not a systemic problem," White told The Indianapolis Star (<http://bit.ly/mQ3z2K>). "We don't ask the state board to be math majors. We ask them to be logical."

State board member Daniel Elsener said he met many dedicated teachers during community meetings at schools facing state probation who he thought could make a difference if the school system was improved.

"If you try for six years, what would make anybody think that, under the same system, they can make anything work unless there was a very dramatic change in the rules, regulations and systems?" said Elsener, the president of Marian University in Indianapolis. "Why could they not change it?"

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Colorado: County Ups the Ante in Voucher War

Wall Street Journal

By: Stephanie Simeon

August 5, 2011

<http://professional.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903885604576488472660592718.html?mg=reno-wsj>

DENVER—In a bold bid to revamp public education, a suburban district south of Denver has begun handing out vouchers that use public money to help its largely affluent residents send their children to private and church-based schools.

The move is being challenged in state court and a judge has held hearings this week to determine if the program can go forward.

Douglas County School Superintendent Elizabeth Celania-Fagen at Cougar Run Elementary in November.

The Douglas County School District experiment is noteworthy because nearly all voucher programs nationally aim to help children who are poor, have special needs or are trapped in failing public schools. Douglas County, by contrast, is one of the most affluent in the U.S., with household income nearly double the national median, and has schools ranked among the best in Colorado.

The program is also unique in that the district explicitly promotes the move as a way for it to save money. The district is, in effect, outsourcing some students' education to the private sector for less than it would spend to teach them in public schools.

If Douglas County persuades the courts to sign off, it could transform the debate about vouchers nationwide, potentially turning them into a perk for families who want more than even high-performing public schools offer.

"This is a radical idea," said Claire Smrekar, an investigator at the National Center on School Choice, a federal research organization.

Nationally, most voucher programs are run by states. Qualified students receive a voucher that is accepted as full payment at local private schools.

Douglas County does it differently, acting as middleman between state and student—and taking a cut. The state sends the district \$6,100 per pupil; the district forwards 75% to each voucher recipient and keeps the rest. Even after administrative costs, the district expects to make what amounts to a profit of \$400,000 this year on the 500 students in its pilot program.

That money will be used to "provide services to the students that are left behind in the regular schools," district spokesman Randy Barber said.

State education officials consulted with the district on the program and haven't objected to it.

Opponents, however, fear kids in traditional public schools will suffer. If a high school loses 10 freshmen to vouchers, for instance, it loses more than \$50,000. In response, the principal may lay off a math teacher and distribute his students among other instructors, raising class size. The district says it will help the hardest-hit schools, but acknowledges some class sizes may increase.

That enrages parent Cindy Barnard, who says it isn't fair that her son's education in public schools may be diminished so her neighbors can use tax dollars to pay private-school tuition.

But Derrick Doyle, who plans to use vouchers to send his twins to a religious school, says the district is right to help all parents find the best fit for their kids. Parents dissatisfied with class size at their public school, he said, can always pursue other options.

Indeed, the Douglas County system embraces school choice, already offering charter, magnet and online schools. Officials there say the vouchers are a logical next step, helping parents to access different types of education, including faith-based schooling. "It's about parents being able to decide what's best for their children," said Meghann Silverthorn, a school-board member.

About 20 private schools in the area accept vouchers. They're a diverse lot, though predominantly religious: A tiny secular academy serving a few dozen first- through eighth-graders; a Jesuit high school with nearly 1,600 students; a church-based school that touts its curriculum as "unashamedly creationist" and Bible-based. One school accepting vouchers serves only gifted kids, another focuses on students with disabilities.

Many are highly selective, requiring entrance exams and, in some cases, statements of faith. Tuition ranges roughly from \$7,000 to \$15,000 a year, and vouchers only cover the first \$4,500 or so; parents must find other aid or pay the rest out of pocket. The most popular school among voucher recipients, Valor Christian High School, charges \$14,000 tuition plus fees of as much as \$6,000 for books, sports and field trips.

Because the vouchers are being used at religious schools, the move has drawn fire from the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and a parent coalition. All have sued in state court. A ruling on their request for an injunction is expected soon.

Their lawsuit cites a state constitutional provision forbidding public expenditure to support church-based schools. The state Supreme Court has signaled a flexible interpretation, ruling that college students can use state scholarships to attend religious institutions. But Mark Silverstein, legal director for the ACLU of Colorado, says K-12 education is different because young students are more vulnerable to indoctrination.

District officials say they aren't sending money directly to religious schools. Vouchers go to parents, who decide where to spend

them. In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a similar arrangement in Cleveland, Ohio.

Critics also say the voucher plan discriminates because most private schools won't accept disabled or struggling students, and because families can only use the vouchers if they have the resources to pay the rest of the tuition bill. District data show the vouchers have been claimed disproportionately by students in the county's wealthiest public schools.

Mr. Barber, the district spokesman, says the vouchers were available to all, without regard to ability, faith or wealth. "We really had nothing to do with who chose to take them," he said.

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New York Thinks Outside Teacher Education Box

Education Week

By [Stephen Sawchuk](#)

August 5, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/05/37ny.h30.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/05/37ny.h30.html?tkn=MPNFEukVrd8LYQf5D4%2ByFc%2FuTC38ESNqYcny&cmp=clp-edweek)

[tkn=MPNFEukVrd8LYQf5D4%2ByFc%2FuTC38ESNqYcny&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/05/37ny.h30.html?tkn=MPNFEukVrd8LYQf5D4%2ByFc%2FuTC38ESNqYcny&cmp=clp-edweek)

Of all the states that have taken steps to rethink systems for preparing teachers, New York appears to be experimenting with the greatest variety of approaches.

Under a series of actions by the state board of regents over the past 1½ years, it has approved the first new graduate school of education in the state in more than half a century; cracked open the door to allow nonuniversity programs to prepare teachers at the graduate-degree level; and financed a variety of "clinically rich" pilot training programs at traditional schools of education.

The state is also in the beginning phases of tying a series of teacher assessments to its tiered-certification system, a move that ultimately will require all teachers to pass performance exams and demonstrate their impact on student learning to receive a professional certificate.

"The regents are interested in figuring out how they use all the levers at their authority to drive an increase in teacher effectiveness throughout the state," John King, the state commissioner of education, said in a recent interview.

Making a priority of more hands-on, practical training linked closely to student achievement reflects a call from many in the teacher-preparation world, from the U.S. secretary of education to teacher education accrediting bodies.

But New York officials have promised much and face obstacles to their state's agenda that are as much conceptual as practical. Several of the newest ventures have raised eyebrows among traditional teacher-educators for de-emphasizing a more theoretical approach, even as others hope the momentum continues.

New York's steps have been aided by its unique governance structure, which gives the regents' board oversight of P-12 education, higher education, and teacher certification, roles that are governed by several boards in other states.

"New York is very brave in taking this on," said Robert L. Hughes, the president of New Visions for Public Schools, which operates an unusual teacher-residency preparation program in partnership with Hunter College, part of the City University of New York. "I hope the state leadership will continue to eat its Wheaties."

New Programs, New School

Look no further than New York City's famed [American Museum of Natural History](#), which won a share of some \$12.5 million in a competition organized by the state regents, for an idea of what's on the state's teacher education agenda.

Next summer, it will become the first museum in the nation to formally train secondary-level science teachers, who will earn their master's degrees under the authority of the board of regents.

The [state competition](#) was designed to underwrite pilot programs—both within and outside higher education institutions—to train teachers at the graduate level.

The museum's president, Ellen V. Futter, described the program as a natural outgrowth of the museum's engagement in science education, which includes long-standing partnerships with several schools of education around the city; a history of providing teacher professional development; and a corps of professional educators on staff, in addition to 200 scientists.

"Our role in science education and working with schools has become increasingly formal over the last couple of years," Ms. Futter said. "There is a crisis in science education, and we have felt it incumbent on us, given the resources we have and the leverage we have, to play a prominent role in addressing that."

The museum's program, like other teacher-residency programs, includes a yearlong student-teaching apprenticeship in schools. In addition, it puts a special emphasis on ensuring teachers-in-training not only know science content, but also engage in the scientific process: They will be expected to work alongside scientists during one part of the program.

A handful of other recent actions by the state board push the teacher-training envelope in other ways. In February, the regents [approved](#) the first new education school in 80 years, the [Relay School of Education](#), which opens its doors this summer.

The program grew out of a teacher-training-program partnership, called [Teacher U](#), between Hunter College and three charter-management organizations. That program focuses on the inculcation of specific teaching techniques and strategies and the use of video analysis to help candidates improve their practice. To graduate, candidates also must demonstrate during student-teaching that they helped their students gain at least a year's worth of learning. ("[College and Charter Groups Team Up to Train Teachers.](#)" Feb. 6, 2008.)

According to Norman Atkins, the president of Relay, the school will maintain those features, while pushing the boundaries of teacher education even further—for instance, by doing away with the typical series of three-credit-hour courses in favor of 60 competencies students must master.

"Think about the traditional course if you're a reading teacher. It finishes in one semester," Mr. Atkins noted. "It's not as useful as taking the instruction in reading and developing skills around that over the course of two years."

The state is investing in traditional teacher education institutions, too. A majority of winners in the contest were traditional schools of education, a heartening sign for some.

"While I was dean, a concern I've had about the reform mentality was the idea it couldn't happen in existing schools of education. I think that's false," said Deborah Eldridge, who until recently led the teacher education school for Lehman College, located in the Bronx.

Lehman's grant under the state competition will be used to support stipends for students in a federally sponsored, fifth-year teaching-residency program launching this summer with five schools in that New York City borough.

One of its novel features: recruiting ethnically diverse teacher-candidates with high GPAs from the community in which they will serve, Ms. Eldridge said.

Former Chief's Role

Those in New York's teacher education community agree that many of the changes bear the imprint of David M. Steiner, the dean of the education school at Hunter College, who recently returned to that position after a stint as state education commissioner from 2009 until this year.

Before his "sabbatical," Mr. Steiner was instrumental at Hunter in introducing the use of video analysis to offer specific critiques to teacher-candidates keyed to a teaching framework. He also helped create the Teacher U partnership. (Mr. Steiner recused himself from the Relay decision and from the state competitive-grant program because of his connections to the applicants.)

In an interview, Mr. Steiner identified yet another recent decision by the regents that could potentially shift teacher education. Under the overhaul, the state will, in essence, use its tiered-licensing system to require all teachers to demonstrate student-achievement growth in a manner similar to that at the Teacher U and Relay programs.

In New York, teachers must earn professional certification within five years of receiving an initial license. The process is essentially synonymous with earning a master's degree. With the overhaul, quietly approved by the regents in May 2010, teachers will need to pass an in-depth demonstration of skills as part of the certification process—along with proof that they have advanced their students' learning through a value-added metric, where available.

Mr. Steiner believes the changes will cause more teacher education programs to rethink their curricula to ensure teachers are prepared for the review.

"In my view, it's among the most important work we've done," Mr. Steiner said of the certification shift. "Teacher-preparation programs will undergo major changes. The performance assessments will match the teaching standards, some of which are very granular. Certification will be much more based on observation, and that is a sea change."

National Debate

The new models and the planned changes have generated widespread discussion in New York, some of them striking at the very heart of what it means to prepare teachers in the 21st century: Should teacher education focus more on the training of scholars and thinkers or on hands-on skills?

Relay's bid to operate a radically different graduate school of education, for instance, generated concern from eight higher-education-based programs in New York City. Many of them cited concerns that a focus on specific skills and competencies would devalue the production of scholarship that would help inform practice.

Mary M. Brabeck, the dean of New York University's school of education, for instance, drew a distinction between undergraduate preparation and graduate-level work, the focus on the state's changes.

"I think there's a difference between teaching skills and academic learning," she said, drawing an analogy to medical schools. "A doctor has to learn how to practice medicine—but he also needs to know what is the chemistry and the physiology and anatomy behind that technique.

"In my judgment," she said, "graduate programs need to come out of places that have both the faculties and the facilities for that kind of theoretical and empirical work, and that's universities."

On the flip side are those like Mr. Hughes of the New Visions partnership, who expressed disappointment that the state competition financed only one nontraditional graduate teacher education provider. His group unsuccessfully bid under the state competition to pilot a graduate-level program on its own.

"It's been a powerful relationship, and we've learned a lot," Mr. Hughes said of his group's formal relationship with Hunter College. "But we think it's important to lodge teacher certification and development directly in schools and more forcefully privilege the craft knowledge that emerges in highly effective schools over time."

The contours of the debate are similar to those that have emerged in the national area of teacher preparation.

In late June, five U.S. senators introduced a [bill](#) that would give federal grants to states to support programs like Relay, even if they were not run by universities—and that would free recipients from existing teacher education regulations. The proposal recently [came under fire](#) from a number of higher education groups, including the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Still other influential groups have, so far, taken a middle road in the debate. Relay's bid for independence was supported by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the Washington-based group featured the school's approach in a recent report. ("[Momentum Builds to Restructure Teacher Education.](#)" November 17, 2010.)

NCATE President James G. Cibulka said he expects more states and programs to experiment with competency-based approaches. But he, too, cautioned against teacher training that becomes, in his words, too "vocational."

"There is a danger in that kind of reform, as there is in any reform, that it could degenerate into something which is very narrow," he said.

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