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**CC:**

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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/2/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 5/2/11

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## NATIONAL NEWS

### **Access to Challenging Math Courses Varies Widely, Study Says**

Education Week

By: Erik Robelen

April 29, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/04/us\\_students\\_exposed\\_to\\_easier.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2011/04/us_students_exposed_to_easier.html)

U.S. students typically encounter an easier math curriculum than those in many other nations, a new study finds, with wide differences also seen across states and school districts. These differences, the study suggests, appear to take a heavy toll on student achievement.

The analysis, [published](#) in the May issue of the *American Journal of Education*, drew on data from the 1999 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or [TIMSS](#), which included 13 U.S. school districts and nine states, as well nearly 40 other nations.

"Overall, U.S. students are exposed to a less difficult school mathematics curriculum that places them at a disadvantage when compared to the students in many other countries of the world," write the researchers, led by William H. Schmidt, an education professor at Michigan State University. "Even sadder, a student's mathematics learning opportunities related to content coverage are deeply affected by where the student lives and in which of the 13 local school districts or nine states he or she attends school."

The variations seen in math curriculum were correlated with students' overall 8th grade math achievement. Students in those states and districts with less demanding math coursework performed much worse than those who faced a more challenging curriculum, according to the study by researchers both at Michigan State University and the University of Oklahoma. The differences were most apparent in those districts with high concentrations of students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, such as those living in poverty. However, the contrast was still evident even after controlling for student background, including a measure of students' 7th grade achievement.

"The consequences are clear—less opportunity to learn challenging mathematics corresponds to lower achievement," the study says.

The authors argue that the heart of the problem is systemic and tied to the structure and design of the U.S. education system.

"The threat embodied in our current system is not just that some children or students may be left behind," the authors say. "The more serious threat may well be that entire districts and states and the children ... in them may be left behind because of the specific mathematics content decisions those districts and states have made."

Speaking of math, my colleague Michelle Davis recently [wrote](#) about Project K-Nect, a grant-funded program that has adopted

smartphones as teaching tools in some math classes. Research on the program has shown a measurable effect on students' math achievement and their interest in the subject, she writes.

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## School Choice and Urban Diversity

Wall Street Journal

By: John Norquist

May 2, 2011

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703567404576293350693023120.html?mod=WSJ\\_Opinion\\_LEFTTopOpinion](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703567404576293350693023120.html?mod=WSJ_Opinion_LEFTTopOpinion)

*Many more middle-class parents would live in big cities if they could pick the schools their kids attend.*

With several new GOP governors taking power, shock if not awe pervades the Midwest, particularly among those of us who are Democratic urban dwellers. Perhaps the wave of corporate tax breaks, service cuts to the needy, and transfer of school aid from poor to wealthy districts will be undone with the next swing of the political pendulum. Yet there is one GOP budget provision in Wisconsin that I hope survives.

For 20 years there's been debate about parental school choice, but only a few places actually have it. Milwaukee has had choice since 1991. At first it was very limited—no religious schools, the program restricted to families with very low incomes, and a cap on total enrollment of 1,000. But parents are now able to choose religious schools, the income limit has been raised to 175% of the federal poverty line (\$39,113), and the cap has increased to 22,500 students.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker has proposed allowing any Milwaukee parent, regardless of income, to enroll their children in private and parochial schools. This will address two problems with the current choice program. One, the cap on total enrollment has forced parents onto waiting lists and into lotteries. Two, the income limit has the effect of isolating low-income students from other more affluent students.

Other jurisdictions, including Florida, Arizona and Cleveland, have choice programs. In Washington, D.C., choice was implemented under President George W. Bush and frozen under President Barack Obama. But Florida's program requires a public school to fail, with failure measured by the state, not by parents. And all choice programs have limitations that undermine the desire of parents to have their children attend a school in which they have confidence. Yet if you think about it, America already has a school choice program in large metro areas. It's a system that segregates the poor from the rich and works against Americans who want to live in cities. Here's how it works.

If a young couple moves to, say, St. Louis and chooses a home in one of the city's revitalizing neighborhoods like Forest Park, everything goes well until their first child approaches school age. They might decide to pay for private education at one of the few such schools in the city. Or they might take a chance on getting into one of the city's elite magnet schools. But what looks like the surest way to enroll their child in a good school is to move to a suburb, such as Webster Grove. The schools there draw from a mostly affluent population, have a large tax base behind each child, and are free of charge if you live there.

So although the couple enjoys urban life in St. Louis, they leave for better school opportunities. This process occurs all across the country; many parents with resources move away from cities and suburbs where poor people live.

Some may say that's the natural course of events. But in most provinces of Canada, parents can choose private and religious education with financial assistance from the government. And every nation in Western Europe, including heavily unionized social democracies like the Netherlands and Sweden, has some form of parental school choice.

People with children and money don't cluster outside European or Canadian cities to avoid sending their kids to school with the poor. And the poor who live in cities have the opportunity to attend public, private and parochial schools that are appreciated by a large cross section of parents.

American liberals have been reluctant to embrace school choice, fearing it will drain resources from government-operated schools. Yet isn't it even worse to support a system that rewards concentration of the rich in exclusive suburbs segregated from the poor? Of course there are affluent people (Bill Clinton and Barack Obama come to mind) who enroll their children in urban private schools like D.C.'s Sidwell Friends, which still has some children enrolled from the choice program. Many more, including middle-class parents, would live in economically and racially diverse cities once school choice was universally available.

If expanded, Milwaukee's choice program will demonstrate this to the whole country.

*Mr. Norquist was the Democratic mayor of Milwaukee from 1988 to 2004. He is now president of the Congress for the New Urbanism.*

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## Two families choose different paths to academic excellence

Los Angeles Times

By: Teresa Watanabe

May 1, 2011

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-tiger-20110502.0.5024364.full.story>

*Jade Larriva-Latt and Derek Lee are both successful students. Her summers are filled with non-scholastic pursuits. For him, summer is the time to sprint ahead in the race to the academic top. The two approaches — one parent-driven, the other more relaxed — have become part of a national debate.*

Summers for eighth-grader Jade Larriva-Latt are filled with soccer and backpacking, art galleries and museums, library volunteer work and sleep-away camp. There is no summer school, no tutoring.

"They need their childhood," says Jade's father, Cesar Larriva, an associate professor of education at Cal Poly Pomona. "It's a huge concern of mine, the lack of balance from pushing them too hard."

For 10th-grader Derek Lee, summer is the time to sprint ahead in the ferocious race to the academic top. He polishes off geometry, algebra and calculus ahead of schedule and masters SAT content (he earned a perfect 800 on the math portion last fall). This year, he plans to take college-level courses, maybe at UCLA or Stanford.

"You give your kids pressure so they can learn to handle it," says Derek's mother, Meiling Lee, smacking her fist into her hand. "Because finally they have to go out into the real world, and the real world is tough."

Jade and Derek both live in San Marino, a graceful town of boutique businesses, tree-lined streets and a well-heeled populace. Three-fourths of the 13,000 residents, who are primarily Asian and white, boast college or graduate degrees; the median household income of \$160,000 is three times the national average.

It is also home to California's highest-performing unified school district, drawing the Lees from Monterey Park in 1986 and the Larriva-Latts from South Pasadena three years ago. Immersed in an educational climate of high expectations — the district last year scored 951 out of 1,000 on the state's Academic Performance Index, based on students' standardized test scores — both Derek and Jade have excelled.

But the two families — one Chinese, one Mexican/Jewish— have made strikingly different decisions about how to pursue academic excellence. One relies on a parent-driven focus on tutoring, advanced classes and testing drills, while the other allows broader choices and a more relaxed approach. Which style produces superior results — and whether culture affects choices — are questions that have become part of a national debate thanks to the book "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" by Yale law professor Amy Chua.

In her best-selling memoir about raising two daughters, Chua advocates an authoritarian style that pushes kids through discipline, diligence and relentless drilling with little time for fun — no sleepovers, play dates or sports. Chua labels it Chinese parenting, though she acknowledges that other races and ethnicities employ the same approach. She argues that Western parenting does not push children hard enough and is overly concerned with their self-esteem.

The Lees and the Larriva-Latts reflect the opposing styles and philosophies. But despite the different paths, their children are succeeding.

Derek's approach is captured on a single Excel spreadsheet listing his schedule from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week. More than 24 hours a week are penciled in for tutoring — Advanced Placement chemistry, AP calculus, AP English — plus Chinese-language school and violin. On Saturdays, he starts at 8:30 a.m. with four hours of Chinese school, followed by nearly six hours of math tutoring, finishing at 11 p.m. With AP exams looming in May, he has added even more study hours.

His mother, Meiling, who created the schedule, is a vivacious, irrepressible immigrant from Taiwan. Developed over 25 years with four sons, her system is not easy or cheap, she warns. Her architect husband makes a comfortable living, but Lee says she forgoes fancy jewelry to afford the \$3,000 monthly tutoring costs per child she has sometimes spent.

The program requires strict training, firm rules, constant monitoring, unapologetic scolding and, most of all, a plan that begins in kindergarten.

That's when Lee started her sons on outside math classes with 10 pages of daily drills and frequent visits to bookstores. She made them take violin lessons. But she really kicked into gear when the boys entered middle school, the precursor to the all-important high school years when grades and test scores count for college admissions. Between grades eight and 10, she says, having fun is dangerously distracting.

"You have to build the study habit," she explains, likening kids to Jell-O that must be molded before hardening.

By eighth grade, Derek was taking a college-level biology course at a tutoring center. His entire high school course load, outside AP classes, SAT test schedule and the tutoring needed to propel him to perfect scores were mapped out.

His mother monitored him via the family's surveillance cameras and even made him study during their one-week Newport Beach summer vacation.

At first he hated the regimen, longing for more free time to shoot Nerf guns and play video games. Two-thirds of the way through, he blew up at his mother. "You're so tired," he explains. "You're so angry."

But Meiling, who spoke little English when she immigrated here in 1979, said she was only thinking of his future. "A good college is a passport to another world," she told him. "It will decide your fate."

Today, Derek, a lanky sophomore, powers through, generally without complaint.

He understands that he'll lose his phone for bad grades — including Bs, which he says are known as "Asian Fail." He accepts that a few months before an AP exam, he will be cut off from video games, leisure reading — almost anything besides school and eight grueling hours of studying a day.

But Derek also knows that when he hits those A's and perfect test scores, he'll feel great about himself and get cool rewards: an iPhone 4, Ultimate Ears headphones, a computer with four gigs of RAM to play with during his downtime: a few hours immediately after school or on Sunday afternoons.

He knows the system works. Eldest brother George, 30, went to MIT, is pursuing a graduate degree in computer science at Caltech and has started his own software business. Ted, 24, graduated from Johns Hopkins University and earned a master's degree in biomedical engineering at USC. Randy, 17, a San Marino senior, is armed for college with a 4.0-plus grade-point average and eight AP courses — six of which he aced with the highest exam score of five.

"The way to be superior is to go to a better college," says Derek, 16. "The way to get to a better college is to get good grades. And the way to get good grades is to go to a tutor.... If you work hard, you can improve on anything."

In any case, he knows he has no choice. "My mom influences everything," he says. "All of my brothers did it. If you don't do it, you stand out and you're a failure."

Meiling says people may criticize Chinese moms but points out it was Americans who built the system requiring stratospheric grades and test scores, academic honors and unique achievements to enter elite schools.

Waving her chart of GPA, SAT and AP goals, she exclaims: "We just try to meet these goals, and then they call us Tiger Moms!"

A few miles away, Cesar Larriva and his wife, Jenna Latt, a chemical engineer, have told their girls, Jade and Alejandra, that they expect them to attend a college or university. They expect them to work hard and do their best. But they don't push extra tutoring on them — the parents help them at home — and they don't reward A's or punish Bs.

"If they do well, that's a reward in itself," Larriva says. "And if they don't do well, I tell them to focus on the learning. The grades will come. We want them to be interested in the disciplines."

"Learning for the joy of learning," Latt adds.

The Larriva-Latts try to make book learning meaningful and relevant for their girls. Jade and Alejandra visit museums, art galleries and the public library regularly. They read two daily newspapers — science is Jade's favorite topic, sports is Alejandra's. They listen to public radio. They watch and discuss documentaries about healthcare and food safety and learn about scientists and other achievers to fire their own dreams and ambitions.

They also play sports and musical instruments, enjoy sleepovers and perform in school plays.

"We want them to be independent, self-sustaining, happy adults," Latt says.

"They have to develop a passion for something and push themselves," Larriva says. "If they don't get into Stanford, they'll get into another good university."

Not that the parents let them slide. Latt restricted Alejandra's iTouch usage this year when she noticed her daughter wasn't reading enough.

But the couple allow the girls to make many of their own choices. Summer school for Alejandra? "No way," the 12-year-old says. "I'm doing baseball."

Jade, 13, is more ambivalent. She says she has no interest in outside tutoring and being pushed like her friends. She expects to do well — not for her parents, she says, but for herself. On her own, she often studies four hours a night and earns all A's, except for Bs in honors math.

But surrounded by so many hard-charging students determined to get ahead, it is hard not to feel the pressure. Jade admits she was nervous last year when many of her friends — most of them Asian — attended summer school, had tutors and read

textbooks early.

Now, with summer approaching, she is worrying again.

Her father tells her to relax. Play tennis.

Jade says she'll probably go to summer school.

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## **FLORIDA NEWS**

### **Legislation Spells Big Change for Florida Schools**

Lakeland Ledger

By: Zac Anderson

April 30, 2011

<http://www.theledger.com/article/20110430/NEWS/110439946?p=all&tc=pgall&tc=ar>

TALLAHASSEE – Largely obscured by the budget and other major issues dominating the capital this year, a series of education bills on the brink of passing the Legislature could bring the biggest transformation of Florida schools in years.

Measures to roll back class size restrictions, bump up the number of school vouchers, expand charter schools and mandate online classes are all expected to clear both chambers and secure the governor's approval.

Add in a bill already signed by Gov. Rick Scott that ends teacher tenure and ties salaries to student test scores, and major cuts to state school spending, and education experts say Florida's public school system will undergo dramatic change.

Long-time education reform advocates say 2011 may represent the full flowering of former Gov. Jeb Bush's education agenda — once bitterly contested by many state lawmakers and now expanding with relative ease in a more solidly conservative Legislature.

"The import of the education bills being considered is really substantial," said Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, a former school superintendent and a strong supporter of Bush's ideas. "I think it's a sea change."

The state teachers' union has aggressively fought the reforms and many Democrats remain opposed. Sen Bill Montford, D-Tallahassee, said teachers and public school leaders feel besieged.

"This is an exceptionally aggressive year for education in Florida," said Montford, a former educator and the CEO of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents.

But lawmakers show no signs of slowing down.

All of the major education bills are positioned to pass both the House and Senate this week as the Legislature moves rapidly toward adjournment Friday.

Scott has expressed strong support for conservative education reforms.

The bills will:

**Mandate online education:** Students from kindergarten through high school would be allowed to take any or all of their classes online from schools operated by the state, local districts or charter school companies. The bill mandates that every high school student in the state take at least one online class. Online schools would be allowed to hire uncertified adjunct instructors. All statewide student assessments like the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test would be administered online by 2014. Critics say the online courses are education on the cheap, and will erode the quality of public schools. Proponents say the courses provide more options and flexibility.

**Roll back class size:** 561 different types of classes - including every Advanced Placement and foreign language class - will no longer be considered "core" components of the curriculum and rules mandating smaller class sizes will no longer apply. The bill decreases the number of core classes by 66 percent, from 849 to 288 class types. Critics say it is a backdoor way to gut Florida's 2002 constitutional amendment limiting class sizes. Proponents - including many Democrats - say it loosens up class size restrictions that were too rigid and expensive.

**Expand charter schools:** Designates charter schools with good test scores as "high performing" and allows them to increase enrollment, add grade levels and create new schools with fewer restrictions and oversight. School districts would have less leeway to deny charter school applications.

**Increase school vouchers:** Florida's McKay Scholarships, which pays for disabled students to attend private schools, would expand to include students with food allergies, asthma, attention deficit disorder and other conditions less severe than the current standards. By some estimates, more than 50,000 new students would qualify.

Another voucher program that helps poor students attend private schools would be primed for significantly more funding under a separate voucher bill. Corporations will be able to donate 100 percent of their state tax bill to the scholarship program, instead of 75 percent under current law. The bill also gives scholarship administrators access to a list of the state's top 100 corporate taxpayers to solicit more funds.

Require merit pay and an end to teacher tenure: A bill already approved by lawmakers and signed by the governor earlier this year makes it easier for school districts to fire low performing teachers and ties teacher salaries to student test scores. Teachers aggressively fought the new rules.

Many of these issues — vouchers, charter schools, class size, teacher evaluations — have sparked epic legislative battles in Florida over the last decade. Passing a bill on any one of the issues would have been considered a major achievement in years past.

That so many education reforms are passing in one year with relatively little opposition or publicity speaks to the preponderance of high-profile issues — from restructuring the Florida Supreme Court to cracking down on illegal immigration and closing a \$4 billion budget gap — occupying lawmakers and the expanded conservative majorities in the Legislature.

"These are mammoth changes but folks have been very distracted by the scope of other issues out there," said Kevin Watson, a lobbyist with the state teachers' union.

But another factor speeding the reforms is the changing attitude of many top Democrats. President Barack Obama recently voiced support for teacher merit pay and expanding charter schools. Obama and Bush appeared together at a Miami high school in March to promote federal education reforms.

Even the loosening of Florida's class size limits — long a line in the sand for Florida Democrats who consider smaller class sizes one of the party's signature school reforms — is now drawing broad support as a money-saving measure for struggling school districts.

Only one Democratic senator voted against rolling back the class size restrictions last week.

Sen. Nan Rich, D-Weston, said the class size bill has some flaws but added: "I think we all agree that there needed to be some flexibility."

Other issues like charter schools and limited voucher programs have attained a certain comfort level with some Democrats after strong resistance when Bush first introduced many of the ideas in Florida a decade ago. The Bush-era education clashes have increased lawmakers familiarity with reform ideas and softened some of the opposition.

"I am very much in favor of a strong public school system but within the scope of that there's room for all kinds of variations," said Sen. Gwen Margolis, D-Miami, who supports more vouchers for disabled students. "I support more choices for parents."

The Bush years serve as a backdrop for much of the Legislature's 2011 education agenda. The former governor is credited with helping to boost Florida's school system in national rankings and he continues to influence the debate by traveling around the country promoting Florida's reforms.

But Bush also benefited from a booming economy that allowed consistent increases in education spending during his two terms. And his reforms coincided with the class size law, leading some to question which change had a larger impact on student performance.

As classes grow more crowded and funding decreases, school districts will be under intense pressure to increase student performance with fewer resources.

"I think they're overreaching," Watson said. "And I'm not sure it won't backfire."

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## Grouping kids by race or ethnicity in charter schools has merit, backers say

Orlando Sentinel

By: Dave Weber

May 1, 2011

[http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-charter-schools-segregation2-20110501.0.1925875.full\\_story](http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-charter-schools-segregation2-20110501.0.1925875.full_story)

Segregation in Florida's charter schools is more by circumstance than design, say charter supporters. They argue that addressing the academic shortcomings of students often means devoting more attention to minorities.

They point to annual state reports showing that black and Hispanic students who attend charter schools are more likely to score higher on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests in reading, math and science than their counterparts in traditional public schools.

They highlight successful charter schools, such as the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) national chain that targets black and Hispanic students. The KIPP charter, which opened last fall in Jacksonville and has 96 percent black enrollment, recently received accolades from Gov. Rick Scott for helping minority students achieve academically.

That's justification for grouping students by race or ethnicity in charter schools, supporters say.

"I would not call it segregation," said Patricia Levesque, executive director of former Gov. Jeb Bush's Foundation for Florida's Future, a lobbying group. "Charter schools may target minority communities because they want to provide those students with options."

But others are not sold on charters that are top-heavy by race or ethnicity. Some Orange County school-district officials are questioning the approach.

"It is not balanced," said School Board member Christine Moore, who has raised concerns.

An Orlando Sentinel analysis shows that one in eight of the state's 456 charter schools has enrollments 90 percent or more of a single race or ethnicity, with more than half of the charters topping the two-thirds mark. That's a considerably higher proportion than in traditional public schools and adds to the existing number of out-of-balance schools where educators often struggle to improve student achievement.

Civil rights activists say creating schools with populations that are heavily Hispanic or African-American simply creates more campuses that lack money, have poorer-quality teachers and lower student improvement.

"Any publicly funded school that has racial segregation should be a concern," said Erica Frankenberg, an assistant professor at Penn State University who has been studying segregation in Florida's charter schools.

But black and Hispanic schools are not the only concerns Frankenberg and others have. The explosion of charter schools, which are attended by nearly 6 percent of the state's public-school students, has resulted in more predominantly white schools, too.

And despite claims by the Florida Department of Education, some local school officials are not convinced charter schools outperform traditional classrooms.

"The myth that charter schools are better than regular public schools is just that: a myth," said Bill Sublette, chairman of the Orange County School Board.

Debate on charter-school performance nationwide remains inconclusive. There is disagreement on Florida results, too.

Researchers at Stanford University looked at charters in 15 states and the District of Columbia, and Florida's did not show well. The 2009 study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes lists Florida among six "states that demonstrated lower than average charter school student growth than their peers in traditional schools."

Some, such as the 92 percent black Nap Ford charter in downtown Orlando, can offer no proof one way or the other. The school has not received a grade for the past two years because state law excuses charters that do not meet guidelines for evaluation, typically because they are small.

Nearly a third of Florida's charter schools did not receive grades last year, including Duval County's Tiger Academy, where not a single teacher was "highly qualified," a federal standard met by all but 5 percent of Florida teachers.

Orlando's 99 percent-black Imani charter, which opened last fall as a "culturally responsive" school, is under fire for a poor instructional program and misappropriation of funds. Predominantly black Rio Grande Charter nearby has remained open despite poor state grades, including a D last year.

School district officials across the state complain that it is difficult to deny requests for a charter or pull the plug on failing schools because the charter movement is pushed by influential state leaders, including Scott and former Gov. Bush. His foundation is lobbying the Legislature to make the approval process easier for some charter schools.

Bush and others are quick to point out that many charters are successful.

The A-graded Lake Eola Charter is popular with more-affluent parents seeking education options in downtown Orlando. Its white enrollment of 65 percent puts it among the 15 "whitest" of Orange's 235 schools, state data show. Five other of Orange County's 28 charters are on that list of 15 whitest schools, too.

Legacy High Charter in Ocoee at 77 percent has the largest proportion of white students of any public school in Orange County. Hope elementary and middle charter, which shares its campus, is close behind at 69 percent. Nearby Ocoee High, which Legacy students otherwise might attend, is only 37 percent white.

"I thought we would appeal to kids who were falling through the cracks," said Crystal Yoakum, director of Hope and Legacy. "But we found it was parents who were just unhappy with the traditional schools."

Though her initial goal was to help struggling students, she now describes Hope and Legacy as "very middle-class."

Legacy and Hope, which are receiving about \$3.5 million in state funding this year, have expanded to more than 500 students in a decade, with a waiting list that runs to 400.

Nearby, the tiny communities of Oakland and Belle Isle both started charters, predominantly white, that are alternatives to the more diverse local public schools. Belle Isle officials said a big concern was finding an alternative to Oak Ridge High School, which routinely receives D's and F's in state grading.

Pam MacDonald of Winter Garden drives past Dillard Street and Tildenville elementary schools — both rated A by the state — to take her three kids to Oakland Avenue Charter, also an A school. She is zoned for Dillard but favors Oakland Avenue because, with about 500 students, it is smaller.

"It has a sense of community and family," MacDonald said.

Though officials at the Oakland and Belle Isle schools say they do not discriminate, residents of the affluent towns get dibs on seats. The schools do not offer transportation, so enrollment is only for students whose parents can get them to school, despite state law that says charters must "ensure that transportation is not a barrier to equal access for all students residing within a reasonable distance."

Nearby public schools feel the pinch from charters. Although Pine Castle Elementary, which serves Belle Isle, is an A school, it lost students to the new Cornerstone Charter, which opened at the Methodist church next door last fall.

"It did change my demographics," said Pine Castle Principal Janice Quint, who now has proportionately fewer white students, more Hispanic students and more low-income students.

Chris Bernier started overseeing charters for the Orange County School Board a few months ago and quickly noticed the racially and ethnically skewed enrollments. He wondered why.

"It is a question I have been asking the state as well," he said.

Bernier has begun meeting with Orange's charter-school officials in hopes of steering them toward a more diverse enrollment.

But state officials see no wrong and have no plans for change.

"What the charter schools are doing is ministering to special needs," said Sen. David Simmons, R-Maitland, a charter supporter. "No one is segregating."

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## Florida charter school advocate warns of problems amid growth

St. Petersburg Times

By: Tom Marshall

April 30, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/florida-charter-school-advocate-warns-of-problems-amid-growth/1167137>

*One touts expansion of the schools, the other warns of abuses of power and funds.*

There are two competing visions of charter schools in Florida - one rosy, and one far darker.

One bill approved in the Senate last week would clear the path for a dramatic expansion in the number of such schools. "High-performing" companies could open charters in new counties, even if districts object, on licenses that run 15 years.

Then there's SB 1596. It would ban charter companies from swapping students between schools without telling their parents, or pulling down more state and federal money than they're entitled to. And it would outlaw the practice of operating schools via out-of-town governing boards - something Tampa Bay area districts have fought to prevent.

Sen. Eleanor Sobel had a hand in both of them.

The Hollywood Democrat broke ranks with her colleagues to vote on the charter expansion bill. She also wrote SB 1596 after witnessing problems in her own back yard of Broward County. She's standing behind it, even though it stands little chance of success in the waning hours of the Republican-dominated Legislature.

"I'm a fan of charters as an alternative to the traditional public schools," Sobel said of the schools, which use public money but

operate independently. "But like anything else, there are a couple of rotten apples that make the rest look bad."

She learned of problems at four Coral Springs charters - Broward Community Charter School, Broward Community Middle, Broward Community Charter West and Discovery Middle - at a School Board meeting in the fall.

All four sit at the same address. And they're run by the same principal and for-profit management company, Arizona-based Leona Group LLC, which runs about 60 charters in six states.

The trouble started when one school, Discovery Middle, earned an F grade in spring 2009. Over the summer, officials later determined, principal John Drag exchanged students with the A-rated Broward Community Middle located in the same building.

"And they were doing it without the parents' consent," said Sobel, 65. "The parents didn't even know which school the kids were in."

Company officials said they did tell parents, but failed to notify the district until after the fact. "The district would expect, and rightly so, a written notification," said Leona's general counsel, Michael R. Atkins.

He said Drag's motivation for switching the students was simply to "match staff with students" and academic needs.

But the swapping appeared to have an immediate effect on the schools' grades. Within a year, Discovery had vaulted from F to B, while Broward Community Middle slipped from A to F.

Such grades help determine which schools qualify for state recognition and capital outlay money. And under its contract with the district, Atkins said, back-to-back F grades could have led to the school's closure.

Raising startup money through the federal Charter School Program proved easy. State records show three of the Coral Springs schools enrolling 556 students together pulled in more than \$1.4 million to purchase equipment and services or pay salaries. And the newest, Discovery, which enrolls 91 students, has applied for a grant of its own.

Federal guidelines for the program - which doles out the largest share of its money through state education departments - prohibit giving multiple grants to schools "if, in fact, they are operated as one charter school." Sharing administrators or facilities could disqualify a school from qualifying for a grant of its own.

Atkins said the grants were sought and spent before his company began working with the Broward charters in the summer of 2008. Florida Department of Education officials could not immediately say whether they erred in awarding federal money to the schools.

But Sobel's bill would draw a clear line, barring the state from awarding such money to charters that share facilities or administrators.

As it stands now, state governments have plenty of leeway in interpreting the requirements. And school management companies are pulling in growing proportions of the awards, which last year totaled more than \$138 million.

"I think when they wrote the Public Charter School Program bill (in the 1990s), it was because these schools really needed the startup money," said Gary Miron, an education professor at Western Michigan University, where 80 percent of the state's charter schools are now run by for-profit firms.

"But many of these companies, they don't need this money up front, because they have so much capital," he said, describing the allure of charter companies for venture capital firms. "If it wasn't profitable, they wouldn't be getting all of these investors."

### *Absentee boards*

Sobel's bill would also require that a majority of a charter school's board members live within the district.

That would resolve some headaches in the Tampa Bay area, where districts have struggled to maintain local representation with companies based in other counties or states.

"It just makes sense for a parent who has a concern to be able to go to the school's board meeting, and that the board members are easily accessible and close by," said Dot Clark, charter schools coordinator for the Pinellas County School District.

Last year, officials there objected when Virginia-based Imagine Schools placed one of its own employees - an Imagine principal in Sarasota County - on the board of its F-rated St. Petersburg charter. And Hillsborough fought a proposal by Charter Schools USA of Fort Lauderdale for two schools to be overseen by a board that typically meets at company headquarters.

"Our concern is that parents would have more difficulty in being able to talk to their board members, to know who they even are, and to attend any board meetings that are going to take place," Clark said.

Under an earlier version of Republican Sen. John Thrasher's bill to expand charter schools, companies would have been exempted from maintaining any local presence at all.

But Sobel persuaded him, as well as the backers of a House version of the bill, to accept an amendment that allows districts to require at least two members of a charter's board to live within its borders.

"If the amendment comes out, I'm not voting for the final bill," she added.

Regardless of which bills are adopted, she plans to keep pushing officials to maintain their scrutiny over public schools, including charters.

"If the charter schools are not performing as they should be, then we should fix them," Sobel said.

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## **STATE NEWS**

### **Younger Bush is working for education reforms**

Detroit Free Press

By: Carol Cain

May 1, 2011

<http://www.freep.com/article/20110501/COL24/105010445/Carol-Cain-Younger-Bush-working-education-reforms>

As governors across the country work to reform antiquated education systems, more are looking to Jeb Bush for inspiration and ideas.

And as the 2012 presidential contest begins with no one rising to the top of the GOP side of the ledger, some are quietly sounding a drumbeat about Bush, Florida's 43rd governor, who served from 1999 to 2007.

"When it comes to education, he is a modern-day Superman who has bold ideas and knows how to get things implemented," said Tom Watkins, former Michigan state school superintendent who worked with Bush in launching the first charter school in Florida in the 1990s.

"With the Republican field open, he offers a pragmatic, measured response to issues that could make the electorate ready to embrace another Bush," he added.

Since leaving office, Bush, who runs the Foundation for Excellence in Education ([www.excelined.org](http://www.excelined.org)), has been advising governors and legislators about how he implemented his "Florida Formula" to reinvent education in his state.

The 58-year-old younger brother of former President George W. Bush and son of former President George H.W. Bush was in Minneapolis this week talking to legislators.

Bush, who has also been in touch with Gov. Rick Snyder's team about education, dismissed talk of his running in 2012.

He also didn't want to discuss political prospects in 2016, instead focusing on education. But as is sometimes the case with politics, saying no isn't always the final word.

Snyder last week laid out a plan that included changes involving merit pay, teacher tenure, charter schools, online learning and more.

"I'm very impressed," Bush said after examining Snyder's dashboard of educational plans he hopes to implement. "It's a comprehensive sweep of reforms rather than just one thing."

In Bush's formula, digital learning is paramount.

Others agree, including an organization in Belleville.

"We can reinvent education to personalize learning, offer opportunities in and out of school, prepare kids for the hyper-competitive global economy and opportunities for international collaborations," said Glen Taylor, co-executive director of WAY -- Widening Advancement for Youth ( [www.wayprogram.net](http://www.wayprogram.net) ).

Taylor and Beth Baker, who co-founded the program, met recently with Bush in Florida, where they are expanding.

Getting back to the national political stage and education, Bush took some heat when he stood alongside President Barack Obama at a Miami school as they both talked of reform.

"The president's heart is in the right place on education," said Bush, who told me he doesn't agree with all of Obama's ideas. "It's better to embrace the things we agree on than fight over the things we don't."

Sage advice for Michigan.

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## A Voucher Victory in Indiana, a Lawsuit in Idaho

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

April 28, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state\\_edwatch/2011/04/a\\_voucher\\_victory\\_in\\_indiana\\_a\\_lawsuit\\_in\\_idaho.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/04/a_voucher_victory_in_indiana_a_lawsuit_in_idaho.html)

Indiana lawmakers have [approved](#) what may be the nation's most ambitious voucher program, one that will allow middle-income families to access taxpayer funds for private school tuition.

The measure was approved by the Indiana House on Wednesday by a 55-43 vote, and it will now go to the desk of Gov. Mitch Daniels, who supports it. In addition, Indiana lawmakers approved a separate measure to promote charter school expansion in the state. Earlier this month, they gave their blessing to yet another [proposal](#), to judge teachers and school administrators based on performance, including their ability to raise student test scores. (See my [previous coverage](#) of the Indiana voucher measure, and the [wave of voucher proposals](#) coming out of GOP-dominated legislatures this year.)

Political junkies are looking at those proposals and wondering if they'll serve as the education platform for presidential-candidate-Daniels, should he make a bid for the 2012 Republican nomination, as some GOP loyalists are hoping.

Whether that platform would be to Daniels' advantage is anyone's guess. President Obama has supported charters and merit pay, occasionally rankling teachers' unions in doing so. The clearest divide between them on school policy would seem to focus on private school vouchers, which Obama's administration [has opposed](#), yet which have traditionally been a staple of the GOP agenda.

So fast-forward to debate night, 2012...Mitch Daniels is on stage, arguing that he has dramatically expanded choices for middle school families and allowed them to use their share of public money however they see fit. Obama, in theory, responds by calling into question why taxpayers are expected to foot the bill for middle-class families' private school tuition.

Meanwhile, in another state that has had a busy legislative season, Idaho, a new law that reduces teachers' collective bargaining rights is [facing a lawsuit](#). The Idaho Education Association, a teachers' union that fought the measure, is suing to block the measure, claiming it's unconstitutional.

The union [says](#) the law violates existing contracts, and that it runs afoul of the law by rolling several subjects into the same bill. So tell me, all ye scholars of Idaho's constitution: does the union have a case?

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## Texas state senators approve teacher effectiveness bill

Associated Press

By: Staff

April 28, 2011

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/tx/7541992.html>

AUSTIN, Texas — The Texas Senate has approved legislation meant to improve evaluation of the state's public school teachers and develop methods to help them succeed in the classroom.

Republican Sen. Florence Shapiro touts her bill as a bipartisan effort to keep effective teachers while helping them improve.

The bill approved Thursday would require teacher appraisals based on observation, student performance and other measures.

Schools would have to provide timely feedback and offer opportunities for teachers to reach established goals. Supporters say such measures would help teachers know their strengths and gather practical methods for improving on weaknesses.

Some teacher groups have concerns about the bill they say have yet to be addressed.

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