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NATIONAL NEWS

11 States Seek Relief from 'No Child' Provisions, in Return for Raising Standards

New York Times

By Sam Dillon

November 15, 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/16/education/11-states-seek-relief-from-no-child-provisions.html?_r=2&ref=education

Eleven states applied for waivers exempting them from key provisions of the [No Child Left Behind](#) law by the federal government's first deadline, promising in return to adopt higher standards and carry out other elements of the Obama administration's school improvement agenda, the Department of Education said on Tuesday.

Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Tennessee asked the department for relief from some No Child provisions, including the requirement that all students be proficient in English and math by 2014. In their applications, the states outlined plans to develop their own locally designed school accountability systems, create new educator-evaluation systems and overhaul their lowest-performing schools, the department said.

President Obama said in announcing the waiver program in September that it was necessary because many states had already adopted new common academic standards and were taking other steps that were in conflict with the requirements of the 2002 No Child law. Since Congress had made little progress in rewriting the law, Mr. Obama said, his administration felt obligated to offer states relief.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has invited states to apply for the waivers in several rounds. The first deadline was Monday, and a second is scheduled for mid-February.

About 28 states — including New York and Connecticut — as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have declared their intention to apply in the second round, the department said.

The 11 states' applications are to be evaluated by peer reviewers starting after Thanksgiving, and they will be told of the department's verdict in January.

Four of the states that met Monday's first-round deadline were winners of the administration's Race to the Top grant program: Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts and Tennessee. Their experiences in assembling those federal grant applications last year probably made preparing their waiver requests easier because both had similar requirements.

Under the waiver program, states must set performance targets so students who graduate from high school are ready for college

or to join the military or the work force. In exchange, schools will not be declared failing if their students are not fully proficient by 2014, and they will be free to evaluate student progress using multiple measures, rather than just test scores.

They will also be granted more flexibility in how they spend federal dollars for needy students.

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Governor Perry Would Scrap the U.S. Department of Education

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

November 15, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/11/gov_perry_calls_for_scrapping.html

So it's official: Gov. Rick Perry is now calling for getting rid of the U.S. Department of Education, as part of the GOP presidential hopeful's new plan to overhaul the federal government, released today.

As anyone with access to YouTube knows, Perry, a Republican from Texas, made a [major gaffe](#) in a recent presidential debate, when he was unable to remember all three of the federal agencies he was planning to eliminate. He remembered the Education Department was on the hit list, though. The other two agencies are the Department of Commerce and the Department of Energy.

But, at the time, his official campaign plan didn't actually call for scrapping the department, just [hacking](#) it in half. Apparently, he's changed his mind. Check out the whole plan [here](#).

Perry doesn't give any details as to just how he'd go about dismantling the Department. But it's [tough](#) to do.

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KIPP Charter Network Receives \$25.5 Million From Walton Family Foundation

Education Week

By: Christina Samuels

November 15, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2011/11/kipp_charter_network_receives.html

The Walton Family Foundation is announcing its plans today to donate \$25.5 million to the Knowledge is Power Program, or KIPP, charter network.

The Bentonville, Arkansas-based foundation, created by Wal-Mart founders Sam and Helen Walton, has been a longtime supporter of KIPP schools. But this award is the foundation's largest gift to KIPP so far. It's intended to provide support to help double the number of students attending KIPP schools by 2015, raising the number of children enrolled from 32,000 this year to 59,000.

In a press release announcing the award, Jim Blew, who leads Walton's K-12 education efforts, said the foundation is concentrating resources on KIPP because it "has an established track record of creating public schools of excellence in low-income communities, and there is growing evidence that traditional public school systems are striving to replicate KIPP's successes."

Currently, the San Francisco-based network has 109 charter schools in 20 states and the District of Columbia. The grant, however, will go to the KIPP Foundation rather than directly to the schools themselves, which are locally run in 30 regions across the country.

Steve Mancini, a spokesman for the KIPP foundation, said the funds will help underwrite professional development for future KIPP school leaders, research and data collection. The organization's plan is train 750 KIPP educators to become founders, assistant principals, deans of students, special education directors, and other leaders for KIPP schools through the foundation's yearlong training program, which consists of summer institutes, coaching, and professional development workshops throughout the school year.

Mancini said KIPP also wants to survey parents and teachers to get a better idea of their overall experience at KIPP schools.

As the number of schools expands, Mancini said, the idea is "go deeper" where there are existing KIPP schools. For example, Atlanta would expand its existing network of five KIPP schools to eight; New Orleans would grow from nine to 12.

"We see it as the holidays came early for KIPP," said Mancini.

The KIPP network wasn't the only charter network sharing expansion plans this week. Uplift Education, a Dallas-area charter network, is set to announce tomorrow the details of its plan to add 20 schools and grow from 5,700 students to 13,000 students by the 2015-16 school year.

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Waiver would change school accountability in Minnesota

Associated Press

By: Staff

November 15, 2011

<http://www.kare11.com/news/article/946555/14/Waiver-would-change-school-accountability-in-Minn>

MINNEAPOLIS - Minnesota's request for a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind law shows how state educators would like to switch to a more nuanced system to judge school performance, although there are several hurdles to clear before parents would see a difference.

Educators in Minnesota and throughout the country have long said the nine-year-old law unfairly labels far too many schools as failures based on the comparison of one group of students' math and reading test scores to those of similar groups of students who took the test the year before.

After U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan warned that 82 percent of the nation's schools could be labeled as failures next year, President Barack Obama outlined a plan in September in which states could apply for waivers to the law in exchange for adopting certain educational reforms. The first deadline was Monday.

In the waiver application filed with the U.S. Department of Education on Monday evening, the Minnesota Department of Education proposed to swap out the current system of school accountability. "We know that several things go into what make a school excellent," said Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius.

Under the plan, schools would still be judged on the proficiency of their students in math and reading - but they would also have to show academic growth in individual students, a shrinking achievement gap between middle-class white students and their classmates and a strong high school graduation rate.

Cassellius said the department would publicize how schools fared by those measures so parents could make better decisions about their children's education. The system would also tag only the bottom 15 percent of schools for reform so the state could focus its resources better.

The waiver application would also lift some existing sanctions for schools that are considered failing under No Child Left Behind. In September, the state Education Department reported that nearly half of Minnesota's 2,255 schools didn't hit the law's benchmarks last year. Schools that repeatedly missed the mark have faced penalties, including forced staffing changes and being required to provide students with free after-school tutoring and busing to better schools.

The U.S. Department of Education is expected to rule on the first round of application requests early next year. "I think we will get a yes, hopefully," Cassellius said. If not, she said there should be enough time to modify the request and still receive a waiver for the school year starting in fall 2012.

Another hurdle is what's happening in Congress, where both the Senate and the House are overhauling the No Child Left Behind law. The bill that eventually comes out could overrule the changes Minnesota and the other states are proposing in their waiver requests.

The law, which was passed during George W. Bush's presidency with bipartisan support, sought to hold schools accountable for student performance and set a 2014 goal by which all students should be proficient in math and reading. Many educators contend that the 2014 goal is unattainable and that the sanctions schools would face have forced them to place too much emphasis on a few high-stakes tests.

The current bipartisan agreement that Congress needs to overhaul the law is one of the reasons that U.S. Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., the chairman of the House education committee, has spoken out against the waiver program since Obama and Duncan announced it.

"Right now, states facing budget strains are dedicating limited resources to meet new requirements dictated by the secretary of education that could easily be changed by Congress or the next administration," Kline said Tuesday in a prepared statement.

Cassellius said it was worth the risk because the state's schools and the children they educate need relief from the current law. "We just can't wait anymore," she said. "We're mislabeling schools, we're missing some schools, it's just absolutely unacceptable."

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Concerns About Education Plan at Iowa Governor Branstad's Stops;

Governor Says It's Not Final

Marion Patch

By: Scott Raynor and Alison Gowans

November 15, 2011

<http://marion.patch.com/articles/branstad-speaks-on-education-at-linn-mar>

Iowa Governor Terry Branstad spoke on his education blueprint for reform and took questions from audiences in the two towns.

Teachers and parents expressed concern about Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad's education plan during stops in Cedar Falls and Marion on Tuesday.

After a forum at Cedar Falls High School, Jim Young, a fourth-grade teacher at Hansen Elementary, said he was afraid teacher input wouldn't make it into Branstad's education reform plan.

"People who were farthest from the classroom are making these decisions," he said.

Branstad's education blueprint has received some [harsh criticism](#) since it was announced last month, and that continued on Tuesday, although it received some positive feedback, too.

The Iowa governor and Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds reminded a group of more than 100 residents, teachers, school administrators and a few classes at [Linn-Mar](#) Learning and Resource Center in Marion, that the blueprint is -- as its name suggests -- not final.

"It is just that -- it is a blueprint. Gov. Branstad and I have been going to Iowa seeking comments on the blueprint. Revisions will be made," Reynolds said.

After a stop in Marion in the early afternoon, Branstad traveled up the road to Cedar Falls where he addressed nearly 200 teachers, parents, concerned community members and a handful of students in the Cedar Falls High School's auditorium.

The most pervasive concerns from the audience centered on how teacher pay would be determined and how the blueprint would support students.

While some thanked the governor for bringing attention to education reform, most in a long line that stepped up to the microphone asked pointed questions about details of the plan. The overall tone was skeptical, with many questions critical of the blueprint receiving rounds of applause. The crowd often murmured loudly at the governor's responses.

After a question about how developing a culture of collaboration would work if teachers, working on collaborative teams, were supposed to be competing for pay raises, the governor said, "Competition makes us all stronger."

"No, No!" many people in the crowd shouted.

"We're competing against other teams," the governor replied.

"No, we're not!" crowd members yelled back.

"In sports, in business..." Branstad started, before being cut off by a shout of, "Education isn't business!"

Not all the feedback from the audience was negative on Tuesday. Special assistant for education Linda Fandel, a member of the governor's team, was cheered when she said the blueprint would not focus just on test scores, but on teacher support, curriculum development and other things with the primary goal of student support.

A final recommendation with a price tag will be sent to the Iowa legislature in January, Branstad and Reynolds said. Details of the plan can be found [here](#).

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Tenure, Charters, Vouchers: New Jersey's Lame Duck Session's Big Three

New Jersey Spotlight

By: John Mooney

November 16, 2011

<http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/11/1115/2308/>

The election's over, the legislature's back in session, and education reform is at the top of the docket.

Now that New Jersey's midterm election is over, with little changed in the legislature, it's back to business in the Statehouse -- and that means education reform.

Gov. Chris Christie yesterday put out his now-familiar call for the Democratic-controlled legislature to act on what he said are the state's priorities, starting with his package of proposals on teacher tenure, charter schools, and school vouchers.

The Democratic leadership, for its part, put out its schedule for the next two months, starting next Monday.

And for all of Christie's prodding, which is expected to continue today with an education event in Secaucus, the legislature is actually pretty far along on several of the governor's core proposals.

True, they contain significant Democrat-induced elements, but the chances of passage for at least some of them are pretty strong.

Teacher Tenure

Christie's bill to revamp teacher tenure, sponsored by state Sen. Joseph Kyrillos (R-Monmouth), may have helped start the conversation, but it is the Democrats' distinctly different bills in both the Senate and the Assembly that have the best chance of becoming law.

But even that is hardly guaranteed.

State Sen. Teresa Ruiz (D-Essex), chairman of the education committee, is shepherding the effort in the Senate, and has been at work revising her initial bill for unveiling in the next few weeks.

Its basic premise is that teachers with consecutive years of strong evaluations would be granted tenure, and those with consecutive years of poor ones would see it removed. The details on how many years, how those evaluations are defined, and what happens in between for subpar teachers are still to be worked out, but there is a general sense that the proposal has the support in the Senate, specifically Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester).

The Assembly is trickier, where there is a companion bill from Albert Coutinho (D-Essex), but Patrick Diegnan (D-Middlesex), chairman of the Assembly's education committee, has been more critical and remains a key wild card.

Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver has said she supports tenure reform, but that can mean many things. And never to be underestimated, the New Jersey Education Association has reengaged in the battle. It has offered its own reform proposal that adds a fourth year before a new teacher is granted tenure and streamlines the process for removing it, but it does not have near the same ties between teacher evaluation and student performance that both Christie and Ruiz have said will be central principles.

Charter Schools

Charter school reform has taken on a life of its own under the Democratic leadership, with a half-dozen measures -- some supported by the governor, some not -- at different stages in the legislative process.

The question now is whether they will all be taken up at once -- with a new comprehensive bill possibly being introduced -- or if the legislature will continue chipping away at specific pieces.

Among the most far-reaching bill, and one that has broad bipartisan support -- in principle, if not in specifics -- is legislation that would extend the number of authorizing agencies and organizations able to approve and review new charter schools.

Potentially including colleges and universities and even local school boards, the authorizer bill would significantly expand New Jersey's capacity for and oversight of charter schools, something that even their supporters say has been lacking.

Other bills to strengthen accountability rules on charter schools also appear poised for passage, and one sponsored by Coutinho and state Assemblywoman Mila Jasey (D-Essex), which allows the conversion of private and parochial schools into charter schools, has passed and was signed into law last week.

But the most contentious bill of the package may face a rougher ride. It would require local communities to vote on a new charter school before it can be approved. The measure has been roundly rejected by the Christie administration and some of the Democratic leadership, who fear it will effectively stop charter schools from opening anywhere. It is unclear if it has enough support in the Senate to even be put to a vote.

Another controversial bill that hasn't seen much public debate yet, but has resurfaced in the last few weeks, is the proposed Urban Hope Act, which would allow districts to effectively "charter-ize" their lowest-performing schools and bring in private companies to manage them. Christie announced the proposal last summer in Camden, where it appears to have the backing of South Jersey political leader George Norcross and would be another tool in his very public quest to revamp Camden schools.

School vouchers

The controversies over tenure and charters are nothing compared with those over Christie's push for school vouchers, specifically through the proposed Opportunity Scholarship Act (OSA).

After more than 20 years of debate and a slew of different versions, the proposal sponsored by state Sens. Raymond Lesniak (D-Union) and Thomas Kean Jr. (R-Union) would provide a corporate tax credit to fund up to \$12,000 in scholarships for low-income students in specific low-performing districts to attend schools of their choice, public or private.

And for all the ups and downs to its prospects over the years, it has been as close as ever to passage in the last year, with committees signing off in both the Senate and the Assembly. But it has yet to make the final hurdle of being posted for final vote, hung up on the politics and the details.

The politics hinge largely on the support of Sweeney and Oliver. Sweeney's allegiance to Norcross, a strong OSA backer, has helped its prospects. But Oliver has said she would only post it if it included certain assurances, such as limits on the number of districts and students affected. Once more than 30 districts were included; the latest version has trimmed that down to just a half-dozen or so.

A key player in the process is likely to be Assemblyman Lou Greenwald (D-Camden), named as the new deputy speaker under Oliver. As the Assembly's budget committee chairman, Greenwald said he would support a "true pilot" that would include only a handful of districts and not provide scholarships to existing private school students, among other conditions.

Last week, Christie said he would not rule out a trimmed-down version of the program, saying he recognized that compromise may be required for the landmark bill to pass. The NJEA is not in the mood to compromise on this issue, and if the bill is ever posted, it is sure to lead to furious debate in the weeks or months ahead.

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STATE NEWS

Ohio: New teacher evaluations coming in 2014

Newark Advocate

By: Seth Roy

November 16, 2011

<http://www.newarkadvocate.com/article/20111116/NEWS01/11160305>

COLUMBUS -- The State Board of Education has taken the first step toward creating a statewide teacher evaluation model that would account for student growth.

Board members voted Tuesday to approve the framework for the Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, which would evaluate teachers in four areas: goal-setting, teacher performance and communication and professionalism accounting for half; and student growth measures for the other half.

"It's all supposed to be a uniform system for all of the districts in the state," said Patrick Gallaway, Ohio Department of Education spokesman. "I think, ultimately, it's accountability. We want to be providing the best opportunity for students for their education."

The framework for the plan had to be approved by the end of the year. It includes broad guidelines for identifying teachers as effective or ineffective, with the possibility of affecting employment.

"We need to make sure (students are) college- and career-ready for after high school," Gallaway said. "A lot of students who get to college from Ohio high schools need remedial coursework."

Gallaway said the system doesn't include a merit pay requirement, but some districts could elect to include it.

Value-added

About 130 districts are involved in piloting portions of the evaluation system -- which includes receiving teacher-specific value-added data. All districts will use the system by 2014.

State officials this past week revealed early results of a new teacher effectiveness measure linked to student test scores. The effort, part of a national movement to hold teachers more accountable, has prompted objections from teacher unions across the country.

Using value-added data -- the influence of teachers on students' ability to learn -- Ohio will begin rating those who teach reading and math for grades 4-8 on five measures (least effective to most effective). The ratings are based on students' test scores in math and reading from year to year.

Granville is the only Licking County district involved in the report.

Of the 53 district teachers evaluated -- with some evaluated for both subjects -- none were marked "least effective." About half of the teachers rated as average, and 15 ranked "most effective."

Those numbers are better than the statewide average, with 88.7 percent of teachers ranked average or above, versus 76.5 percent for the state.

The measure is meant to help predict which students will need extra help in the future, not just pinpoint those who failed tests in the past.

Currently, the value-added statistics reach only a small portion of teaching and don't address teachers outside of grades 4-8, or in subjects such as science, social studies, art or physical education.

"It's what we have at our disposal now. They're going to have to find a way to develop some criteria for subjects," Gallaway said.

Evaluating

State officials said the value-added measure is meant to help teachers and school principals learn if teachers are successful with students of differing academic abilities.

"It's all about looking at whether an individual teacher is significant in making more progress with students," said John White, a senior manager at SAS Institute Inc., the Cary, N.C., company that developed the measures for Ohio.

An October report by the National Council on Teacher Quality found 23 states require some evidence of student learning via value-added data or student growth data in current or future teacher evaluations, including Ohio and Indiana. That is up from four states in 2009.

In 19 states and the District of Columbia, teachers can be dismissed based on negative evaluations.

Matt Cohen, the Ohio Department of Education's chief research officer, said it is unclear how much teacher quality information will be available to Ohio's parents and the public.

Teacher groups warn the statistics endanger teachers' jobs -- they question the accuracy.

"At this point, we think it's flawed," said Michele Prater, spokeswoman for the Ohio Education Association. "We think the value-added system should be restricted for the purpose of supporting instruction and student learning," rather than becoming a public report card on teachers.

Prater said the measure can be valuable, but it doesn't present a full picture of a teacher's effect on student learning.

"The test scores from which value-added data are arrived are only one source of information about the performance of students," she said.

White acknowledged teacher value-added statistics aren't perfect. They are based on tests that students take only one day each year, so they're subject to whatever measurement errors or weaknesses are in the tests.

That's why it's important to look for trends in the data over several years, he said.

"With more data we'll have more years of value-added information, and we can be more certain about teachers being effective," he said.

The Cincinnati Enquirer's Denise Smith Amos contributed to this report.

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Opinion: Florida must attract top math teachers to middle schools

Orlando Sentinel

By: Paul Cottle

November 15, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/opinion/os-ed-florida-education-math-111611-20111115.0.7248939.story>

Florida's schools should prepare our children for the new economy.

That doesn't just mean that our best students should have the skills necessary to pursue careers in science and engineering.

It also means that those who aren't going to college should have the math skills needed to hold jobs on a modern assembly line. The New York Times reported last year that many such jobs were difficult to fill because they require mathematical skills that most of those out of work do not possess.

That's why the recent release of the results of the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress by the U.S. Department of Education was such bad news for Florida. At the eighth-grade level, Florida's average score fell further behind the national average than it was in 2009. Only 28 percent of Florida's eighth-graders qualified as "proficient" in math, compared to 35 percent for the nation.

This proficiency gap is also a little wider than it was two years ago.

These results cast a dark shadow on the futures of Florida's children. But what can be done to improve this situation?

One thing our state can do is recruit more strong mathematicians into middle-school teaching. A study published this summer by Michigan State University researchers in the journal *Science* argues that middle-school math instruction is weak in the United States in part because the teachers themselves often have weak math skills.

In a press release, the lead author, William Schmidt, said that "current teacher-preparation programs for middle-school math instructors in the United States do not produce teachers with an internationally competitive level of mathematics knowledge."

With many students now taking algebra 1 and even geometry in middle school, it's easy to see why strong math skills would be important to a teacher at that level.

My family has been fortunate in that all three of our children have been taught math by one particularly outstanding teacher in their middle school.

When I asked my youngest, now a high-school sophomore, what made this teacher so effective, he said without any hesitation, "She was really good at math." This teacher's confidence in her own math abilities rubbed off on her students, including my son and his two older sisters.

Of course, this teacher had also studied how early adolescents learn math and had mastered classroom management. But before all that, she had to have strong math skills.

With the importance of strong middle-school math teachers being so clear, it is alarming that Florida — and much of the nation — continue to experience a nagging shortage of highly qualified math teachers. Figuring out how to recruit more teachers with strong math skills is critical to addressing the eighth-grade math-achievement problem in our state.

One reason for the shortage might be as simple as this: The salaries paid to math teachers are low. Starting teachers' salaries in Florida are near \$35,000. In contrast, the average starting salary offer in a nonteaching job for a recent bachelor's-degree graduate in mathematics is much higher — close to \$50,000 during the 2008-2009 academic year, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers. Paying math teachers more — maybe \$10,000 per year more — might attract a larger number of strong math students into teaching.

Georgia is trying such an experiment now. Starting salaries for new math and science teachers statewide in Georgia have been set by law to be about \$4,700 above the starting salaries in other subjects. Labor economists will be watching how this salary differential affects the effort to recruit teachers in these fields.

There may be other effective ways to make teaching in Florida more attractive to those with strong math skills — ways that might mesh more easily with Florida labor practices. Georgia has a statewide salary schedule that made its differential-pay law straightforward to implement.

In contrast, salaries for Florida teachers are set entirely at the district level, and none of the state's districts have shown any interest in differential pay for teachers in critical-needs subjects.

But it's clear that we have to find something that works. Our students' futures depend on it.

Paul Cottle is a professor of physics at Florida State University and vice chair of the American Physical Society Forum on Education.

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