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NATIONAL NEWS

Education takes a beating nationwide

Los Angeles Times

By: Stephen Ceasar and Teresa Watanabe

July 31, 2011

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-education-budget-cuts-20110731.0.3238887.full.story>

More layoffs, bigger classes, fewer programs and higher tuition are nothing new to U.S. educators, but analysts say this year stands out.

After a particularly brutal budgeting season this summer, states and school districts across the country have fired thousands of teachers, raised college tuition, relaxed standards, slashed days off the academic calendar and gutted pre-kindergarten and summer school programs.

Slashed budgets are nothing new for educators, but experts say this year stands out.

Last year, K-12 budgets were cut \$1.8 billion nationwide. According to estimates by the National Assn. of State Budget Officers, cuts to K-12 for the new fiscal year may reach \$2.5 billion.

A year ago, higher-education budgets across the nation were trimmed \$1.2 billion. The expected cuts this year: \$5 billion.

"They've long since been cutting deep into the bone," said Michael Leachman of the nonpartisan Center on Budget Policies and Priorities, based in Washington.

At least 22 states have scaled back K-12 funding and at least 24 have made cuts in higher education for fiscal year 2012, the center found.

To cover such shortfalls, experts say, school officials often reduce, or eliminate, personnel and programs vital to the most vulnerable populations: lower-income and minority students.

In California, many school districts cut spending for adult education, libraries, textbooks, arts and music, gifted students, tutoring for low-performing high school students and other programs, according to two major surveys, including one by the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office. Many districts shortened the 180-day school year by five days.

"These are extraordinarily inequitable cuts for low-income communities of color," said Arun Ramanathan, executive director of the Education Trust-West, an Oakland-based advocacy group.

He said that a shorter academic year and cuts to summer classes exacerbate their generally lagging achievement because many low-income students cannot afford the enriched activities enjoyed by their middle-class counterparts, such as museum visits and private tutoring.

In Florida, state funds for 15,000 children to attend a school-readiness program for low-income families have been cut, and college tuition was raised 15% for the fourth consecutive year. Texas eliminated funding for pre-kindergarten programs that serve about 100,000 at-risk children.

Though cuts in education reach all demographics, they do not affect all students equally, said Jack Jennings, president of the Center on Education Policy, a nonpartisan research group based in Washington.

"If we're worried about the future, we have to be worried about these equity issues," Jennings said. "Who's going to be the employees, the industry leaders in the future? Increasingly, they will be children of color, and they're not going to close the achievement gap."

Across the country, education officials are finding ways to save money:

In California, many districts have cut back on high school counselors, leaving many students to sort out the college application process on their own.

In New Mexico, some school districts have gone to four-day school weeks.

In Illinois, high school juniors will no longer be evaluated on writing skills after the state eliminated a writing test, saving about \$2.4 million.

University of California students will pay \$1,818 more in tuition this year than last, after increases of 8% and 9.6%, and Cal State University tuition will rise by \$294, to \$5,472.

In Washington state, lawmakers cut more than \$1 billion in class-size reduction, early learning programs and teacher development.

Reaction to such cutbacks has varied. Outside Sioux Falls, S.D., teachers and administrators in the Brandon Valley School District worked without pay during summer school to stave off cancellation of the summer program.

At Wonderland Elementary School in Los Angeles' Laurel Canyon, parents have managed to raise \$450,000 a year to retain science, art, physical education, teachers' assistants, yard supervision and a librarian for a library completed two years ago, parent leader Teri Levy said.

But they have not been able to prevent class sizes from swelling, as they have around the state. At Wonderland, classes in the lower grades have grown from 20 to 28 students in the last few years.

"It's so packed that teachers can't focus on all of the kids in the class," Levy said.

In many parts of the country, parents and teachers have taken to the streets to protest, but to little effect.

In Philadelphia, parents mustered 400 signatures on a petition in hopes of saving the job of Hau Chau, a bilingual counseling assistant at H.A. Brown Elementary. Chau was the only Vietnamese-speaking employee at a school where 18% of students speak the language at home.

"The students feel comfortable, feel protected when I'm there," Chau said. "I try to guide them and talk to their teachers to find a way for the students to feel comfortable and happy while they are in school."

But nearly half of the 103 bilingual counseling assistants and 16 of the 275 teachers of English as a second language in the School District of Philadelphia were laid off. One of them was Chau. (The district says it will move another Vietnamese speaker to H.A. Brown.)

In all, the district laid off 1,228 teachers and 1,277 non-instructional staff members to close a \$629-million shortfall after the state slashed about \$851 million in funds for Pennsylvania public schools.

Pennsylvania highlights a problem nationwide. Many districts relied on the \$787-billion federal stimulus, the Recovery Act of 2009, to make ends meet. The stimulus included \$97.4 billion for education. That money is running out.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett, a Republican, says it was the school districts' insistence in recent years on crafting budgets with federal funds — not the Legislature — that caused more than 3,000 teacher layoffs across the state.

"We will not be laying off the school district teachers," Corbett said. "And the school districts have their own financial decisions

that they have to make. I would note that many of them took the federal money, were told that the federal money would go away, made their budgets in the past based upon that, and now that money is not there."

In California, state budget cuts and declining enrollment have delivered a one-two punch, pushing more than 140 school districts into financial jeopardy. In the last three years, schools have lost \$18 billion they otherwise would have received in state funding and cost-of-living increases — the largest reduction in recent history, according to fiscal experts.

Funding has increased a bit in the last few years — including a \$200-million increase for the 2011-12 school year. Federal aid has helped cushion the blow, but per-pupil funding is still 20% lower than in 2007, according to state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson.

The Legislative Analyst's Office calculates the reductions differently, putting the decline at 11.6%.

The disparities have heightened the challenges of educating the state's 6.2 million schoolchildren, 20% of whom live in poverty and one-third of whom are learning English as a second language.

"It's the worst crisis ever in California schools," Torlakson said.

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Duncan: Teacher Salaries Should Be \$60,000 to \$150,000

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

July 29, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/07/duncan_teacher_salaries_should.html

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called for a radical upending of the nation's teaching pipeline—higher salaries, improved performance-based teacher accountability, and a higher bar for prospective students to enter schools of education.

In remarks today to a conference of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, he called for teachers to start out making \$60,000 a year, topping out at around \$150,000. His speech comes as thousands of teachers from across the country [descend on the nation's capital to protest](#) many of the Obama administration's policies, from the increasing reliance on standardized tests to using test scores to help evaluate teachers.

"We must think radically differently," he said, according to [prepared remarks](#). "We must ask and answer hard questions on topics that have been off limits in the past like staffing practices and school organization, benefits packages and job security—because the answers may give us more realistic ways to afford these new professional conditions."

Top salaries of \$150,000 a year won't come cheap, and Duncan acknowledged as much.

"And it will cost money—and—given the current political climate with the nation wrestling with debt and deficits—I am sure some people will immediately say that we can't afford it without even looking at how to redirect the money we are already spending—and mis-spending.

He called on colleges of education to raise the bar for prospective students, to lure the brightest in. "Top undergraduates will flock to a profession that demands high standards and credentials," he said.

Although Duncan's remarks today shouldn't surprise anyone, this does mark a fresh, reinvigorated push from the secretary, who wants to help remake the way we find, educate, evaluate, and compensate the nation's teaching force. He's [already pushed states](#) to alter policies on merit pay and teacher-student data linkages through the Race to the Top grant competition.

Now, he appears to be using the bully pulpit to continue to advance that message. As he begins to explicitly lay out the problem—the first step in any public policymaking process—expect him in the fall to begin proposing exactly what the Education Department can do to achieve this radical transformation.

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Survey: Alternative Teacher Certification on the Rise

Education Week

By: Liana Heitin

July 29, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2011/07/report_shows_shift_in_teaching_force.html

Four out of 10 new public school teachers hired since 2005 came through alternative teacher-preparation programs, according to a survey just released by the [National Center for Education Information](#). That's up from 22 percent of new teachers hired between 2000 and 2004.

In addition, the survey found that alternative-route teachers are more in favor of using reforms such as performance pay,

elimination of tenure, tying student achievement to teacher evaluations, and market-driven pay to strengthen the teaching profession than are their traditionally prepared counterparts.

However, nearly all teachers, regardless of certification route, support removing incompetent teachers without concern for seniority. And all teachers "are slightly more satisfied with general working conditions and are more satisfied with the status of teachers in the community than were teachers surveyed in 2005, 1996, 1990, and in 1986," according to "Profile of Teachers in the U.S. 2011." This result stands in contrast to the sentiments expressed by those teachers attending the [Save Our Schools rally in Washington](#) this weekend.

The survey also found that the teaching force is becoming younger, less experienced, and increasingly female.

The proportion of teachers younger than 30 doubled between the 2005 and 2011 surveys, from 11 percent to 22 percent. And the proportion of teachers 50 and older dropped from 42 percent in 2005 to 31 percent in 2011. "Clearly, the older teachers are retiring and being replaced once again by teachers in their 20s and 30s," states the report.

In 2005, 18 percent of public school teachers surveyed had five or fewer years of experience. That proportion went up to 26 percent in 2011. The proportion of teachers with 25 years experience or more went down from 27 percent in 2005 to 17 percent in 2011.

And 84 percent of public school teachers are female, up slightly from 2005.

The public K-12 teaching force is still overwhelmingly white at 84 percent, according to the survey—though that is down from 91 percent in 1986.

Alternative-route certification programs bring in both more male teachers and more minorities than traditional preparation programs, according to the report.

As you can imagine, there are plenty more details included in the 86-page report, which you can find [here](#).

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FLORIDA NEWS

Other views: Charters get less money than public schools

Florida Today

By: Patricia Levesque

July 31, 2011

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20110731/OPINION/110729018/Other-views-Charters-get-less-money-than-public-schools-July-31->

A quality education isn't limited to a one-size-fits-all system. Charter schools open up new opportunities for families to select the best learning environment for their student through quality public education options.

Unencumbered by bureaucracy, charter schools are focused on customizing education to meet the unique needs of students through fostering innovative, accountable schools. As a result, charter school enrollment is increasing, with 37,000 students on a waiting list.

While recent reports lead one to believe charter schools are receiving money to the exclusion of public schools, that is not the case. This year, public schools average almost \$1,000 in capital outlay funding for every student. In contrast, charter schools receive less than \$400 per student.

Both of these public school models are held to the same academic standards, but they are funded quite differently. Public schools have a myriad of sources that fund capital projects, while charters are limited to Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funds.

In fact, last year, PECO funds accounted for only 4 percent of traditional public schools' \$2.6 billion budget. This year, traditional public schools will receive \$2.4 billion, while charters will receive only \$55 million.

It's time to realize that public schools and charter schools are working on the same team; they both want to see all Florida students graduate with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed beyond the classroom.

Let's work together to give every Sunshine State student that chance.

Patricia Levesque, executive director of the Foundation for Florida's Future.

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Accountability Shock: Teachers Flee From Schools That Score Low

Associated Press

By: Bill Kaczor

July 31, 2011

<http://www.theledger.com/article/20110731/NEWS/110739872/1005/news02?Title=Teachers-Flee-From-Schools-That-Score-Low-&tc=ar>

TALLAHASSEE | Math teacher Antoine Joseph already had been thinking of leaving Miami Norland Senior High School, so when its annual grade from the state dropped from a D to an F nine years ago that just solidified his decision.

Joseph said it wasn't just a matter of being stigmatized as a failure — he was just tired of the circumstances behind the failing grade.

"There is a propensity to go to another school where the parents are more involved, the students are more eager to learn and they are more thirsty for knowledge," he said.

Joseph apparently was not alone. A recent study by a trio of economists showed a disproportionate number of Florida teachers left schools that got lower grades in 2002 after the state changed the way it evaluated them.

The researchers call it "accountability shock." That's their term for unexpected results from shake-ups in the way students, teachers, administrators or schools are evaluated, graded, rewarded or punished. The study is timely advice because accountability changes are in the works across the nation because of President Barack Obama's "Race to the Top" school initiative. The program is providing \$4.35 billion in federal stimulus money to Florida, 10 other states and the District of Columbia for innovative changes aimed at improving student achievement.

Not a single Florida school had failed in 2001 before the grading change, but Norland was among 63 that received an F after the new procedure was adopted. It bases A-through-F grades on gains students make on standardized tests from year to year rather than simply on that year's scores.

"The increased pressure probably produced some benefits but also led some teachers to move away from low-achieving schools," said Florida State University economist Tim Sass. "The general lesson there is you have to be careful about potentially unintended consequences."

A key provision in Florida's Race to the Top plan, as well as part of a new accountability law, is teacher merit pay that will be closely tied to how much students improve on the standardized tests. Joseph thinks the changes will again cause more teacher transfers.

Joseph transferred in 2002 to William H. Turner Technical Arts High School, which received a C that year, and he's still teaching there. Besides the school grading change, Joseph said a conflict with Norland's principal and personal issues, contributed to his decision to leave.

The Associated Press contacted seven other Miami-Dade County teachers who left failing schools in 2002, but all said they did so for other reasons. Robert Black left Norland for Lake Ariel, Pa., so he could be closer to his aging parents, but said he found the researchers' theory interesting.

"They may not be off by much," Black said. "I know that teachers get very frustrated."

Sass collaborated with Li Feng of Texas State University-San Marcos and David Figlio of Northwestern University. Their study was published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Cambridge, Mass. All three also have done other research on school accountability and performance measures.

They found teachers at failing schools were 1.4 times more likely to leave than those at schools with higher grades.

"The evidence is pretty clear that teachers tend to move toward schools that have higher achievement, fewer kids in poverty, fewer discipline problems," Sass said.

Besides the stigma, Florida's F schools miss out on financial rewards given to those that get an A or show significant improvement. Failing schools, though, do get other help such as additional reading coaches and they may undergo staffing changes. They also could face closure or conversion into charter schools. This year, 31 Florida schools received an F — 1 percent of the total.

While some poorly performing teachers left in 2002, the study indicated that wasn't entirely the case. The researchers found teachers who left for other schools as well as the ones who remained showed improvement. The extra help given to failing schools may have been a factor in the improvement shown by those who stayed, Sass said.

Figlio agreed with the unintended consequences lesson that can be drawn from the study, but said the results also showed "it's really challenging to design a system that takes everything into account."

"The big takeaway message for Race to the Top will be that the schools that serve low-income kids are going to be particularly vulnerable," he said. "Any system that's going to provide incentives for good teachers needs to be particularly focused on these most vulnerable schools."

Florida school officials realized they had a problem with teacher mobility in failing schools soon after the 2002 grading system change.

Wayne Blanton, executive director of the Florida School Boards Association, said some districts gave extra pay to teachers who stayed.

Florida House Education Committee Chairman Bill Proctor, a St. Augustine Republican who is a career educator and chancellor

of Flagler College, said he wasn't surprised by the findings.

"We need to take cognizance of it," Proctor said. "We probably need to be sensitive to it, but the question with each school may be a different."

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A weekend interview with Florida Board of Education vice chairman Roberto Martinez

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeff Solochek

July 30, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/content/weekend-interview-florida-board-education-vice-chairman-roberto-martinez>

For several years, Florida leaders have had to balance budgets with declining revenue. They have said they want to keep education as a top priority, but that hasn't been easy amid competing demands. Through it all, in-depth philosophical conversations on the topic have been limited. State Board of Education vice chairman Roberto Martinez wants to start a public discussion on school funding as lawmakers prepare for their 2012 session. If there's one goal he has in mind, it's to move away from threats of lawsuits to a more measured effort to reach consensus on this critical matter. Martinez spoke with reporter Jeff Solochek about his desires and his rationale for calling for a board workshop on the issue, which will take place Tuesday in Tampa.

I want to know how you see the issue of school finances playing out in the coming years, given all the things we have been seeing, and what you hope to accomplish with this workshop.

I am hoping to to accomplish a number of things. I would like this meeting to be a start for our state to have an honest and public conversation about funding for education. I think we have to look at this in context of the current situation. That is, the economy is not doing well and is likely to recover very slowly. I don't believe we are going to get any new taxes, and I don't support any. The only type of new taxpayer funding that we're going to be getting ... will be with increased economic activity. That will be relatively slowly. We're not going to be getting a lot of new monies over the next couple of years. So I really believe it's going to be taking what we've got and using it as best needed. And that requires the state to prioritize its needs. So it's a matter of making it a priority.

That's a difficult thing to do, because there are a number of worthwhile services and programs that I believe should be supported with taxpayer funds. But we'll never have enough money to support them all. So we've got to make a decision. And I believe that education should be the state's highest priority for a variety of reasons, probably the most important for me based upon how I've seen it help my own family. If you educate people you are giving them an opportunity to be self-sufficient. If you do that, it becomes less a strain on the community and the state. So it just makes sense that what we should do is help develop our people so they can be productive and self-sufficient and law-abiding. That for me is the key for it all.

What services should we not pay for?

I'm not the politician. They're going to have to figure out what is less important. And some people are not going to be happy. And some services are not going to be funded. But we have to make those tough choices. Unfortunately, we have the balanced budget requirement in Florida. But otherwise we're going to get into the mess we're in federally. We can't be all things to all people. So we have to make some tough decisions. And my opinion is education is the highest priority. Regardless of what I think, the people, in the constitution, have made it the paramount duty of the state to adequately fund a high quality education. So that is now enshrined in our constitution through the peoples' decision. ... It's a constitutional mandate to be met by the elected officials. There have been a number of lawsuits through the years to get the court's involvement in getting more funding for public education. I think that is a huge mistake. I do not support that. It is terrible public policy. It will be horrible if it ever gets to that stage, for a variety of reasons. Imagine one judge, sitting someplace, directing the educational programs, micromanaging them, in 67 districts, and also setting it for the state. It cannot be done. It will be a disaster, policy-wise. And I think it would also encroach on the separation of powers. We're talking about appropriations. We're about budgeting. We're talking about the power to tax. And that should not be done by the judiciary. ...

So what I'm hoping is that this forum -- and we're a constitutional body that makes recommendations to the Legislature and to the governor -- I'm hoping that this forum can be useful in jump starting a very important conversation so that the people of Florida can give their elected officials more input, and the elected officials can become very much involved in the public discussion as to how do we prioritize our resources? What should suffer, because we can't be all things to all people? And, if we should prioritize more funding to education, is this supported by the people? How should we do it? What should get cut? I think we need to have that discussion.

Are you talking about setting priorities within the education budget as well as within the general budget?

Both. Absolutely. We need to do that, of course. We need to fund productive services and programs. Florida has done a lot in the last ten years to make sure that we measure performance, that we are outcomes oriented, which is good. I do not support just more funding for education. I want to make that clear. I do not support just more funding for education. That would be

irresponsible. The same way I don't support just more funding for my business. It's how we use that funding that is key. And I think Florida is very good about being very frugal, being very careful as to how it uses its funding for education. I do think we have a lot of good programs in place, good services in place, that could be better funded, that could be more fully funded, and that could make us more productive and that would help our kids be better educated. So I'm hoping to see that happen. We need to have this serious conversation.

A lot of people on the left say just throw more money at the problem. They don't use those words, but that's essentially what they are saying. Terrible idea. Or they're saying, let's get the judiciary involved to force the Legislature to appropriate more funds for education and direct how it should be used. Horrible idea. On the right, you hear a lot of people who don't even want to talk about more funding because they think that will necessarily mean tax increases. I don't support that. ... Or, they are silenced by the need to talk about funding because they feel if they say anything about funding, that will be used in an adequacy lawsuit against the state. I think everybody needs to rise above all that. We're much more sophisticated. There is a great need to have this discussion, and to have it publicly.

What about the concerns that many people have raised that all the money that is going into education is going into non-public education, or their version of non-public education -- the charters, the vouchers, the things that aren't really the schools as we thought of them until very recently?

Again, I think we should avoid those types of simplistic statements from the left or right. I support choice. I support charter schools. I support the use of vouchers. I have children in private schools. I have a child in public schools. ... I think we should have choices, but good choices. Just because something is a charter or private school, that label doesn't make it good. And that needs to be clear. It is to me. It should be to many. There is no magic to that label. ... I think we need to look at all this stuff in a very in-depth, sophisticated manner, as we Floridians are capable of doing.

You're bringing in a ton of people who all are pretty smart people. How are you going to get something good out of all this without it turning into just a lot of talking.

That's a good question. What I am hoping, and I've spoken with a lot of these folks, I have asked them to say whatever they want. I have told them to be objective for high quality education for all of our students. To talk about what they would hope aspirationally to happen, and also to tell us what may be accomplished in a more realistic time frame. There is a scarcity of resources available. ... In order to make their suggestions bear fruit some time relatively soon, just tell us how we get there. ... I would hope that at the end of the day what we would have is some instructions to our staff to turn some of these suggestions into a recommended budget for this year, but then also to start talking about how we implement some of these things over time. This is just a start. For me, it's a first step.

I don't mean to suggest that in the past the department and the board haven't taken this job seriously when it comes to the budget. But I haven't been in my 6-1/2 years involved in an in-depth discussion of the budget, looking at it two ways -- is Florida allocating enough money for education, and really talking about that openly? We've never really had that conversation. ... So I think we need to have it. Are we allocating enough funds to education? If we're not, should we? And should we allocate within the allocation differently? Should we direct our funds differently that we have in the past? the board that I am on is very independent minded, very experienced. ... We're having to address this some really smart people who run organizations -- college presidents, superintendents. We have deep thinkers, but also deep thinkers who have had to deal with the practicality of running an educational institution.

Do you think that this is the start of the State Board being more assertive with the Legislature? Will there be a change in the relationships?

The answer to that question is no. It is not for us to be more assertive with the Legislature. I am not an elected official. I do not have the power to tax or to appropriate. So I respect my role and I respect their role and I am not trying to step into their shoes. I think we should be engaged in this process throughout the year, not just once a year, and I think we should be more engaged in having conversations with the Legislature about the budget process than just a few times a year or here or there, scattered. I think it should be more ongoing. And you know what? I have spoken with some folks, some former legislators. And I think they would appreciate getting the Board of Education being more actively involved in getting recommendations to them. They look to us for our professional guidance. ... I think they would also want it from us in a way that also deals with the realities of the economy. For example, if we all of a sudden start making recommendations that obviously deal with completely pie in the sky situations, we lose credibility. But I think that if we say, "Look, we don't have enough funds, but over time, if we have the ability, this is what we would suggest in order to reach world-class education for every child, which is what we all feel needs to be accomplished," I think they would respect that.

Well, I know when it came to some of the policy things, you would say what you think and they would do what they want and then you would have to deal with it afterward.

They're the elected officials. But I will tell you, it's give and take. At the beginning of this legislative session, Senate president Haridopolous invited me to speak to Sen. Wise's committee (Education Pre-K-12), and I was the first speaker. And I spoke about the need to have a teacher bill. I invited Eric Smith and Patricia Levesque and the three of us spoke. They heard us. We were encouraging a teacher bill that was very much along the lines of the memorandum of understanding for Race to the Top. We wanted a bill, and we also didn't want a bill that was just SB 6 tweaked. We wanted something that built upon the Race to the Top memorandum. And that's what came out. ... There was a lot of dialogue. Eric Smith was terrific in working with the Legislature in a very cooperative manner. Very respectful. So they heard us with regards to that. They've heard us with respect

to many things....

Well, I can't wait to hear what you all come up with.

What I am hoping is that this is a meaningful start in this next phase in the issue of education funding. ... I am saying that because I want to be careful in not falsely raising expectations that cannot be met. I think we will have recommendations that will come out of this. Some will be short-term. Some will be to be implemented over time. If one of the things that it accomplishes ... is that it will get people to start talking about this in an intelligent manner, I think that's very helpful. I want to get us away from the notion that this has to be decided in a courtroom. Horrible law, horrible policy, horrible practice. I just want to get us away from that. For the people who say we need more funding, that is not the solution. For those who say they don't want to talk about it because it will encourage more taxes, well, that's just not the way to do this. We need to talk about what is really needed to help our kids, and then deal with the realities of prioritizing our resources. ... The more people who are involved ... the better our kids are going to be.

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STATE NEWS

New state task force sets out on its task: school accountability

Wisconsin State Journal

By: Matthew DeFour

July 31, 2011

http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/education/local_schools/article_711437c0-ba45-11e0-9ea2-001cc4c002e0.html

An effort to develop a statewide school accountability system marks a turning point in Wisconsin, education experts said last week as a public effort to design the system got under way.

When the modern school accountability movement began in the 1990s, several states such as Massachusetts, Kentucky and Florida developed their own systems for measuring how well schools helped students learn. Wisconsin created a statewide test in 1993, but deferred to local districts on what it meant for schools.

"Some states have embraced (school accountability) more than others," said UW-Madison education professor Doug Harris. "Wisconsin hasn't."

Gov. Scott Walker and State Superintendent Tony Evers, who otherwise have clashed on education issues, have agreed to change that. A task force they formed began collecting information at a symposium last week organized by Walker, Evers and the La Follette School of Public Affairs and will soon meet to begin designing the system.

The effort comes amid mounting pressure on Congress to overhaul No Child Left Behind, the federal law that requires all students be proficient on state math and reading tests by 2014 — a target almost all schools in the country expect to miss. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has indicated states may be able to apply this fall for waivers from the law's requirements if they develop their own accountability systems.

The federal law requires states to administer high-stakes tests with consequences for inadequate student performance. Wisconsin has complied, but the state was criticized for setting a lower bar than others.

Now Wisconsin is among several states developing an alternative to No Child Left Behind. It could become a leader in developing a next-generation model, which would use multiple measures for assessing school effectiveness, said Kathy Christie, chief of staff for the Education Commission of the States.

"The devil is in the details (and) part of the devil is getting agreement on which measures" to use, Christie said.

Accountability systems include high standards, rigorous assessments, rewards, sanctions and public reporting, Christie said.

Evers said the new accountability system most likely will focus on data the state already has the ability to collect, such as proficiency and growth over time on a new state test being developed, advanced placement enrollment, graduation rates, college entrance exam scores and industry certification for students who don't go on to college.

"We will have hard questions around how the state will support and provide technical assistance for low-performing schools," Evers said. "Not that it's rocket science, but it's redeploying resources."

In his election campaign, Walker proposed assigning letter grades to schools based on criteria such as graduation rates, passing rates, enrollment in advanced placement courses, test scores, and teacher and administrator evaluations. Districts would receive resources and support from the state to improve failing schools. Schools with failing grades for three consecutive years would have to choose from four options: replace administrators, replace at least half of the staff, convert to a charter school or close.

Walker said in an interview it would be up to the new task force to work out the details and that he's open to ideas other than those he has proposed. Cost will have to be a consideration, he said.

"What we ultimately want is an easily understood system that parents can look to and say here are all the things they measure, here's what they put the weight on and here's what they found about this school or that school," Walker said.

Miles Turner, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, cautioned against developing a system that is overly simplistic.

"I'm more comfortable with a report card" with multiple measures, he said. "Too often we want the simple and quick answer."

Walker's proposal takes several cues from Florida. The state has made significant strides in closing its achievement gap and raising proficiency levels for all students since assigning grades of A through F to schools in 1999, according to Patricia Levesque, executive director of the Foundation for Excellence in Education, founded by former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush. Walker's office asked that Levesque speak at Thursday's symposium.

Levesque said grades have worked because community leaders and parents at A schools sought ways to improve F schools.

"It was a mark on the whole district," LeVesque said. "There was a lot of adult focus drawn to the schools that were most struggling."

How often to test and which tests should be used to hold schools accountable remains a point of contention. But there is also widespread agreement about the flaws of the current system and some tenets of a better system — even between Walker and the Wisconsin Education Association Council, the state's largest teachers union, which turned down a seat on the task force.

They include:

- Measuring how much student achievement grows from year to year, rather than just whether students are at grade level.
- Holding all schools that receive public funding accountable, including voucher schools.
- Providing resources to improve failing schools.
- Basing proficiency on a common definition of whether high school graduates are ready for college or a career.
- Using multiple measures to assess school performance, though which measures are used and how much they are weighted in an overall school assessment will be a key part of the discussion.

Turner and WEAC president Mary Bell advocated using student portfolios to gauge school performance.

Bell said an expert could judge whether a student's work in a variety of subjects — including those that are harder to test such as writing, music, art or physical education — met standards. Vermont uses such a method, but it can be complex to develop.

"It actually demonstrates what they learn in a way that's far more meaningful to parents in the community," Bell said. "That's a whole lot better than if they can fill in A, B, C or D on a test."

Other possible measures include student discipline and attendance, college attendance and completion, school climate surveys of parents, and school inspections, which are more common in Europe.

Whatever the outcome, students and parents will likely see more testing, more standardization across classrooms and schools, and "it's possible, if things went well, that you'd see better instruction," UW-Madison's Harris said.

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Louisiana: State puts 155 schools on academic watch

The Baton Rouge Advocate

By: Will Sentell

<http://theadvocate.com/news/education/484811-64/state-puts-155-schools-on.html>

The number of public schools that face state sanctions could explode next year when minimum school scores are raised again, according to state figures.

A total of 155 schools are now on an "academic watch list," which means they are below the minimum score needed to avoid intervention by state officials.

That includes 15 schools in the East Baton Rouge Parish school system and one charter school, based on estimates provided

by the state Department of Education.

"We are going to be focusing on those schools, what they need," said Lizabeth Frischhertz, chief accountability officer for the system.

The projected 155 schools are nearly double the 79 that failed to meet the minimum standards announced on Tuesday. The number also represents 11 percent of the public schools statewide.

Under current rules, schools have to score at least 65 out of about 200 to avoid being classified as an academically unacceptable school, and the target of state sanctions.

The scores are based mostly on test results as well as dropout and attendance rates.

State officials announced Tuesday that 79 public schools scored below the minimum required, a 65 percent increase over last year.

Six East Baton Rouge Parish schools joined that list on Tuesday and one escaped the label.

However, the minimum score will rise to 75 next year.

The 155 academic watch list schools have a score of between 65 and 74.9, which means they are on the clock to improve or face sanctions.

Backers say the increased standards are aimed at improving student performance.

Even the new minimum score of 65 means that 61 percent of students at the school are performing below grade level, they note.

Frischhertz said she is optimistic, in part, because the number of East Baton Rouge Parish schools improved from 26 last year to 15 this time. She also noted gains at other schools.

Penny Dastugue, president of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, said history shows tougher standards mean more schools will face state sanctions, then show some gains.

"Historically what is measured and reported gets attention and that is the hope here," Dastugue said in an email response to questions.

Michael Faulk, the new president of the Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, said the state's top School Board might want to take another look at next year's minimum required score of 75 in light of how many schools are below it now.

"Going up 10 points in one year is a lot on a school performance score," said Faulk, who is superintendent of the Central Community School District.

The state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted in January 2010 to raise the minimum score from 60 to 65 this year and to 75 next year.

Faulk noted that superintendents favored a five point increase per year over three years.

Schools that fail to meet the minimum score face sanctions that can begin with steps like after-school tutoring.

However, if they fail to make adequate improvements they can be targets of state takeovers after four years.

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Tennessee Seeks Waiver From No Child Left Behind

Associated Press

By: Staff

July 29, 2011

<http://www.newschannel5.com/story/15175092/tennessee-seeks-waiver-from-no-child-left-behind>

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Governor Bill Haslam said Tennessee is seeking a waiver to use its revamped education standards to measure schools instead of those mandated by No Child Left Behind.

The Republican governor and state Education Commissioner Kevin Huffman told reporters in a conference call on Friday that the federal standards no longer serve the interest of education reform in Tennessee.

Haslam said he once preferred overhauling No Child Left Behind, "but indications out of Washington are that that doesn't seem likely anytime soon."

Both said the legislation which calls for all students to be 100-percent proficient in core subjects by 2014 is simply impossible. In fact, they said "No Child Left Behind" is keeping the state from making real education gains.

Metro school board member Ed Kindall agrees, and said NCLB unfairly labels many schools.

"I think what it does it stereotypes and stigmatizes some our schools as failing schools when really within those schools students are making significant progress," Kindall said.

Has U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has warned that 82 percent of U.S. schools could be labeled failures next year if the federal regulations aren't changed.

Late Friday, members of Tennessee's congressional delegation released a letter sent to the country's education secretary in support of the waiver saying: "Tennessee is providing clear leadership in education reform and proposes an accountability structure that will result in significantly great student achievement gains.

State leaders said the motivation behind any waiver or academic changes would ultimately be for the benefit of students.

Haslam also released results Friday that show only about half of Tennessee schools made "annual yearly progress," or AYP, under No Child Left Behind.

On Monday, Metro school district officials will discuss their status under No Child Left Behind. Failure to meet current guidelines could affect federal funding.

States like Idaho, Montana and South Dakota have also been outspoken and called "No Child Left Behind" requirements unrealistic.

Kentucky will also be seeking a waiver to allow the state to use a different method to measure student progress.

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