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NATIONAL NEWS

New Race to Top: \$500M for Early Ed., \$200M for Round 2 Runners-Up

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

May 25, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/05/race_to_top_500m_for_early_ed.html

Education Secretary Arne Duncan will divvy up the \$700 million in additional Race to the Top money Congress gave him this year between a new contest focused on early education and the nine runners-up that [lost](#) in last year's high-profile state competition, the Education Department announced today.

The nine states that will compete again—using their old Race to the Top proposals in some fashion, which the U.S. Department of Education hasn't specified yet—are: Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and South Carolina. [UPDATE (3 p.m.): Make that eight—South Carolina just said "[no thanks](#)".]

Although details are still emerging, it seems these states will compete for a share of \$200 million to implement a small piece of their old, [second-round Race to the Top proposals](#). The nine states made it to the final interview round of the competition last year, but stalled there. (Just missing the chance to compete for a third time is Oklahoma, which was the 10th runner-up in round two.)

This means Colorado and Louisiana, thought to be shoo-ins to win in last year's competition, now have a shot at a piece of a much smaller pie. It also means New Jersey officials, who [lost out by a mere 5 points](#) after putting a wrong answer on their application, get a chance at some extra federal education money that previously slipped through their fingers.

For the third round of Race to the Top, financed by the federal fiscal 2011 budget, grants will range from \$10 million to \$50 million, depending on the state's size and final number of grants. (That's compared with up to \$700 million that was up for grabs in the first two rounds.) Applications will be available in the early fall.

"In phase 2, we had many more competitive applications than we had funds to award," Duncan said in a statement. "We're committed to working with the states that are the most serious about education reform."

In fact, Duncan said at an Education Department event announcing the two new programs, he's seen "as much or if not more reform" from states that lost, as from those that won under the first two rounds of Race to the Top, which were funded as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, passed in 2009.

Any of the nine states that want a part of the new money will have to work with the department on which piece of their Race to the Top plan they want to implement. (In other words, the department isn't going to let states implement the easiest piece just to get some easy money.) And if not all nine states want or are able to get their piece, the remaining states will get bigger awards.

"It is not a competition between them," Duncan said in a press call today. "Where [states] want to continue to drive reform we want to invest. Where they've lost interest or lost courage we won't."

The other \$500 million will fund the Early Learning Challenge competition. According to the department, this competition will reward states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems with better coordination, clearer learning standards, and meaningful workforce development. Starting today, the public can find out more about this competition, with also involves the Department of Health and Human Services, and give input on the Education Department's [website](#).

The rules, eligibility, and size of the grants will be announced in the coming weeks. It's important to keep in mind that the original Race to the Top was \$4 billion, so even though \$500 million sounds like a lot, it's still a much smaller state competition. And already, HHS spends about \$12 billion a year on early childhood programs such as Head Start.

Still, Duncan said today he wants this early education competition to be a "game changer" just like Race to the Top was for more general education reform.

Early education advocates who gathered at today's event literally cheered about the new money, which will help expand the quality of and access to early childhood programs in states, especially for at-risk children. Advocates continue to emphasize that research shows that quality early childhood programs can have significant effects in terms of lower crime, improved educational outcomes and other quality-of-life factors, for [at least some period of time](#).

The money will help ensure "that we expand the availability of this life-changing experience," said George Kaiser, the founder of the George Kaiser Family Foundation, who spoke at today's event.

The department has until the end of the year to award all of the \$700 million, which Congress gave Duncan and the department in a fiscal 2011 budget deal [brokered](#) in April. Congress gave Duncan the same broad flexibility to implement this \$700 million grant program as it did the original \$4 billion in Race to the Top, with one change: that a new focus on early education be included. The new money allows the department to build on the successful Race to the Top brand.

With another \$200 million in Race to the Top money up for grabs, it will be interesting to see whether all nine runners-up choose to compete, yet again, and for much less money.

The department is making it far easier for this third round by allowing states to use their round-two applications. But there's also new leadership in several states since the second-round competition. California, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina all have new governors, who may or may not want to adhere to the old plans. It's unclear if they'll have flexibility to come up with different ideas.

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Growth in Education Spending Slowed in 2009

New York Times

By: Winnie Hu and Robert Gebeloff

May 25, 2011

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/26/education/26spending.html?_r=1&ref=education

The nation's overall education spending grew at a slower pace in 2009 than at any other time in more than a decade, amid deepening state fiscal woes and flatter tax revenues, according to new census figures released Wednesday.

Public school districts spent an average of \$10,499 per student on elementary and secondary education in the 2009 fiscal year, up 2.3 percent from 2008. In contrast, spending rose by 6.1 percent and 5.8 percent in the two years before that.

"I think they are responding to economic and political realities," said Robert N. Lowry Jr., deputy director of the [New York State Council of School Superintendents](#). "There's been this recognition that times are different."

Total revenues devoted to education — which include money from federal, state and local sources — rose to \$590.9 billion in 2009, or 1.5 percent more than the year before. Of that amount, state revenues accounted for \$276.2 billion (46.7 percent); local revenues, \$258.9 billion (43.8 percent), and federal revenues, \$55.9 billion (9.5 percent).

The report showed that spending slowed as a direct result of big cuts in education aid in some states after years of near constant growth. In total, such aid fell 1.7 percent to \$276 billion, with the largest cuts in Florida, Michigan and California.

Meanwhile, local tax revenue continued to grow, but at a slower rate than in past years; property taxes accounted for about two-thirds of that revenue.

The report does not cover most of the \$100 billion in federal stimulus money distributed to schools beginning in spring 2009, though federal aid did increase by \$8.8 billion during the period.

New York led the nation once again in overall spending, at \$18,126 per student, with school officials pointing to high personnel costs and a large number of state education mandates, among other factors, that push up the cost of education in the state.

Washington, D.C., ranked second, with spending rising 12.4 percent over the previous year — the largest increase in the nation — to \$16,408. The next three highest-spending states were New Jersey (\$16,271), Arkansas (\$15,552) and Vermont (\$15,175).

At the other end of the scale, Utah spent the least per student, at \$6,356, preceded by Idaho (\$7,092), Arizona (\$7,813), Oklahoma (\$7,885), and Tennessee (\$7,897).

Safiya Jafari Simmons, a spokeswoman for the Washington school system, said that “education is a much higher priority in D.C. than it has been in the past decade” and “as such, it is no surprise that we are putting more money into education.”

In New Jersey, the acting education commissioner, [Christopher D. Cerf](#), said the state’s own calculation of education spending was even higher than that done by the Census Bureau, just under \$18,000 per student.

Mr. Cerf said the amount of money is less important than whether it is being spent effectively.

“The measure we should be looking at is how successful we are at graduating all of our students college- and career-ready,” Mr. Cerf said. “I think that is something that is not a function only of dollars, but much more importantly, of policies and practices that drive achievement.”

Employee benefits, including pensions and health care, continued to be the fastest-growing cost in education, increasing at twice the rate of salaries, according to the figures. For instance, benefits accounted for 22 cents of every \$1 spent on schools in 2009, compared with 17 cents in 2002.

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FLORIDA NEWS

FCAT scores released Thursday

Pensacola News Journal

May 25, 2011

By: Erin Kourkounis

<http://www.pnj.com/article/20110525/NEWS01/110525022/FCAT-scores-released-Thursday>

The Department of Education will release the results of the third-grade reading and math FCAT 2.0 assessments at 10 a.m. Thursday.

The 2.0 is an updated version of the FCAT. It is meant to parallel new student academic content standards. The 2.0 will measure student achievement of the "Next Generation Sunshine State Standards" in reading, math and science, instead of the "Sunshine State Standards."

The new tests are being phased in and eventually will replace the FCAT.

According to the DOE website, a full transition requires identifying new achievement levels.

This year, the transition began with reading (third through 10th grades) and math (third through eighth grades). And in 2012, FCAT 2.0 science assessments will be administered to fifth through eighth graders.

To learn more about the FCAT 2.0, visit <http://fcats.fldoe.org/fcat2/>.

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May 26, 2011 - 12:00am 2 of Duval's 3 Gates Millennium scholars credit intervene schools

Florida Times-Union

By: Topher Sanders

May 26, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2011-05-26/story/2-duvals-3-gates-millennium-scholars-credit-intervene-schools#ixzz1NSdjOMAE>

Raines, Ribault scholars defy 'intervene' status.

2 of Duval's 3 Gates Millennium scholars credit intervene schools

What's said and written about Raines and Ribault high schools lately usually focuses on their intervene status or whether the Jacksonville schools can improve on state exams to avoid being turned over to a nonprofit organization for management.

But if you ask students Willie Barron, a Ribault senior, and Brion Eason, a Raines senior, they will tell you that without their

schools they wouldn't have earned scholarships that will pay for their college educations — all the way to a doctorate.

Barron and Eason, both 17, were selected as 2011 Gates Millennium Scholars, an honor that goes to 1,000 students across the United States annually. About 23,000 students apply for the award, which is sponsored by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and pays for each recipient's education through their terminal degree.

Barron and Eason have a lot in common. They both are honor society members, they both represent their schools as Mr. Raines and Mr. Ribault, they attend the same church and they both said they are examples of what can take place in their schools.

"We have teachers here who are preparing us for the future and college, not just for the FCAT," said Barron, also an International Baccalaureate student. "The programs here are successful and they are moving forward regardless of any trials and tribulations that the school may be facing."

Eason agrees.

"If it wasn't for my teachers it would not have been possible," he said of the Gates award. "It's a good school. I love it."

Intervene, not lost

How Raines and Ribault are managed next school year will depend on how well the students performed on this year's Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. High school scores are expected in the coming weeks.

The two students said they understand the attention their schools receive but that they don't receive enough positive attention and that public perception doesn't match their school experience.

Eason tells the story of when he gave a recent tour and the individual said, "Oh, the school is really clean." He said he was offended.

"They see that Raines is intervene so they just think kids are going to be walking around, jumping from the ceiling and doing whatever they want to do," he said. "This school is capable of doing whatever another school that's not an intervene school is capable of. We still have all the same academics and extracurricular activities."

Standout students

Ribault Principal James Young said students like Barron are just the tip of the iceberg at his school.

"Kids like Willie are just a sample of what we have," he said. "Ribault High School has a perception by way of its intervene status that learning is not taking place, but kids like Willie — those types of kids go to ninth grade through 12th grade here — that just shows that learning is taking place. Kids are learning and teachers are teaching."

Lakeisha Burroughs, Eason's former math teacher, said Eason and his classmates are achieving in the face of adversity.

"He is one that stands out as an individual, but he is representative of many of the young people in this school," she said. "These are kids that are fighting despite what's going on and despite what they're saying about these schools, despite what they are saying about the neighborhood, 'I'm going to succeed.' "

One other student received the Gates award in Duval County: Angellic Johnson, a student at The Bolles School. That puts Raines and Ribault in good company, Barron said.

"For me and Brion to receive the same award that she has and for her to attend a private institution, I think it says a whole heck of a lot about Ribault and Raines and everything that we're doing in the four walls of the schools," he said.

Eason is headed to Florida A&M to study graphic design. Barron will attend the University of Florida to study chemistry.

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STATE NEWS

Opinion: Minnesota could learn from Florida

Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune

By: Matthew Ladner

May 25, 2011

<http://www.startribune.com/opinion/otherviews/122613749.html>

Actually, Sunshine State schools lead the way in gains for low-income kids.

The Star Tribune recently editorialized that "[Emulating Florida is a failing strategy](#)" (May 21) but suffered from some serious misperceptions.

The [National Center for Education Statistics](#) gives tests of academic achievement to random samples of students. All 50 states have participated in NAEP since 2003, and since that time, Florida's low-income students have made greater gains on the main

NAEP exams (fourth- and eighth-grade math and reading) than any other state.

The gains of Minnesota's low-income students have amounted to a bit more than a quarter of Florida's progress. The Sunshine State ranks first for gains among low-income students; Minnesota ranks 37th, approximately 50 percent below the national average.

In the 1990s, Florida hovered near the bottom of the NAEP rankings. Today, Florida ranks near the top.

[Daniel Patrick Moynihan](#) once jested that scores on the NAEP are perfectly correlated with proximity to the Canadian border. States wishing to improve their scores, he said, should move closer to Canada.

If Moynihan were alive today, I believe he would be greatly pleased to see such substantial gains in Florida -- a state with a majority-minority student population and with about half of students qualifying for a free or reduced price lunch.

Former Florida Gov. [Jeb Bush addressed](#) the Minnesota Legislature about Florida's multi-faceted reform strategy in April.

The Star Tribune chastised Gov. Bush for not mentioning that Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment requiring schools to lower average class-size in public schools.

But this amendment came after the surge in Florida scores had already begun, and the class-size reductions came slowly.

A Harvard researcher carefully studied Florida's student learning gains and concluded that class-size reduction had little or nothing to do with the progress.

The editorial expressed distaste for the idea of requiring students to earn promotion to the fourth grade by acquiring basic literacy skills. One can only describe the evidence on the Florida program to end social promotion as unambiguously positive.

Florida's strategy involves early detection of problems, academic interventions, strategies for improved parental involvement and retention for those repeatedly failing to display basic literacy skills.

The Florida earned promotion policy, in short, is designed to strongly encourage children to acquire basic literacy skills during the developmentally critical period. The policy has succeeded.

Since enactment, the percentage of Florida third-graders scoring at the lowest reading level has dropped by 40 percent.

Before the earned promotion policy, 41 percent of African American and 35 percent of Hispanic third-graders scored at the lowest reading level. On the most recent exam, that percentage was reduced almost by half.

It is cruel for educators to socially promote students despite illiteracy and then watch as they fall ever further behind with each passing year. Society should not stand by as these students drop out of school in large numbers.

The soft bigotry of low expectations dooms students to a lifetime of hardship.

Florida's success has inspired lawmakers from states as diverse as Arizona, Indiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Ohio and Utah to adopt K-12 reform based on the Florida efforts. Earned promotion is just a part of the formula.

Academic truth in advertising by grading schools A-F based on student proficiency and learning gains, bottom up accountability to parents through increased options, expanded digital learning and incentivizing success all played crucial roles as well.

Minnesota lies in the heart of Big Ten country, where people have long taken justifiable pride in their K-12 scores and the academic prowess of their universities.

The favorable demographics alluded to by Sen. Moynihan, however, have masked a growing problem: Minnesota suffers from the largest racial achievement gaps in the nation.

A system of schooling that gives the least to those starting with less is unworthy of the traditions and ideals of Minnesota.

Liberals and conservatives should work together with educators to fiercely pursue radical improvement in literacy skills. The students with the least have the most to gain.

Dr. Matthew Ladner is the senior adviser for policy and research for the [Foundation for Excellence in Education](#).

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South Carolina: Where One Size (Still) Fits All

Associated Press

By: Staff

May 25, 2011

By one vote, South Carolina's "Republican-controlled" House of Representatives killed a universal school choice bill that would have provided expanded academic options for all parents and a lifeline for more than 100,000 children trapped in failing public schools.

The debate took less than half an hour – which is interesting when you consider that lawmakers spent two days earlier this month passing legislation that made the collard greens the state's "official leafy vegetable."
Priorities, priorities ...

Lawmakers also refused to hold an "up-or-down" vote on the legislation itself, with the decisive vote being a measure to "table" the bill. The result was the same, though – a decisive defeat for parents and children and a resounding victory for the state's education establishment, which once again used taxpayer-funded resources to lobby for the defeat of the legislation.

"Please email our Lexington County Delegation about this bill," a local principal wrote during business hours from his taxpayer-funded computer. "Tell them NO."

Like previous versions of parental choice, the bill defeated by the House would have permitted all South Carolina families to claim a state income tax credit for out-of-pocket tuition expenses. Homeschooling families would be permitted to claim a credit for instructional expenses, and non-profit organizations would provide low-income children with tuition scholarships. To fund those scholarships, both individuals and corporations would be permitted to claim a state tax credit for donations made to Student Scholarship Organizations (SSO's) – IRS-recognized non-profits that would be required to spend 95 percent of their contributions on scholarships for low-income students.

(To read our exhaustive recap of this groundbreaking legislation, [click here](#). To learn more about the bureaucratic forces that have successfully blocked the bill so far, [click here](#). To see for yourself the undisputed failure of our state's current status quo's current approach to public education, [click here](#)).

Despite record funding increases in recent years, South Carolina's public schools continue to fall further behind the rest of the nation. Our abysmal graduation rate has continued to decline – mirroring retreating SAT and stagnating ACT scores. Also, a recent report found that more than one-third of the nation's 100 worst public schools are located in South Carolina.

Nonetheless, lawmakers have appropriated a record \$11,754 per child in the current year's budget– a figure that doesn't include bond money and other local government spending on buildings.

The vote to table (i.e. kill) the legislation passed by a 60-59 margin, with sixteen "Republicans" joining Democrats in opposing the legislation. Those sixteen "Republicans" were:

*Rita Allison
Joan Brady
Doug Brannon
Derham Cole
Danny Cooper
Mike Forrester
Marion Frye
Mike Gambrell
Davey Hiott
Jenny Horne
Steve Moss
Steve Parker
Gene Pinson
B.R. Skelton
Eddie Tallon
Bill Whitmire*

Obviously, had just one of those lawmakers voted the other way we'd be looking at a victory for parents and children ... not another defeat. That's what makes Allison's vote particularly troubling. Last weekend, she told Tea Party leaders in Spartanburg, S.C. that she would vote in favor of the legislation.

What happened? Somebody got to her ...

Hopefully supporters of academic freedom will get in touch with these "Republicans." And hopefully Republican voters will remind each of these lawmakers of what the GOP platform has to say about choice.

"We embrace the healthy competition that will result from a comprehensive school choice plan that includes the private sector, and believe such a system should be instituted from kindergarten through 12th grade," the GOP platform notes. "In addition to improving public school performance, a system of school choice that includes tax credits, scholarship granting organizations and vouchers would offer more compassionate and better opportunities for all children in South Carolina."

Parental choice has proven successful at raising achievement levels everywhere it has been implemented. No wonder Oklahoma and Indiana have implemented new parental choice programs this year, while leaders in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin are moving to expand successful programs in those states.

It's a shame South Carolina continues to ignore proven results – and the rising tide of support for parental choice – by continuing to pour more money into the same old failed status quo.

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Idaho school overhaul foes clear referendum hurdle

Associated Press

By: John Miller

May 26, 2011

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/2011/05/25/1663851/idaho-ed-reform-foes-clear-referendum.html>

Organizers of a bid to dump the education and teachers union overhaul that passed the 2011 Idaho Legislature say they've gathered enough signatures to put all three repeal measures on the November 2012 ballot.

More than 48,000 people signed each of three petitions to put the new Idaho laws to referendum votes next year, Michael Lanza, an organizer of the petitions, announced Wednesday.

Idaho will restrict education union bargaining rights, introduce teacher merit pay and shift money from salaries to classroom technology under the changes backed by public schools chief Tom Luna and Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter earlier this year.

Some teachers, parents and students have criticized the measures, prompting the referendum effort to repeal them. Foes say the overhaul will undermine teachers, increase class sizes and shift state taxpayer money to for-profit, out-of-state companies that will be tapped to provide online curriculum and laptops to students.

"Idaho citizens are eager to have a chance to vote on the three education laws passed by the Idaho Legislature," said Lanza, adding his group will gather more signatures before turning them in to the state June 6. "We know that people don't want to see the larger class sizes, layoffs and unfunded technology mandates that these laws are already causing."

Before the repeal measures get on the 2012 ballot, county clerks in Idaho's 44 counties are verifying the signatures, making sure they've come from registered voters. They won't be officially qualified until Secretary of State Ben Ysursa vets them, as well.

Luna, who has made bringing merit pay to Idaho's education system a priority since he was first elected superintendent of public instruction in 2006, said he is confident that voters would turn back any effort to repeal his laws, debate over which dominated the last Legislature.

He said organizers of the repeal are defending the "status quo," a situation where Idaho's superintendents struggle to remove bad teachers, staffing is based on seniority, not teacher ability, and "classrooms remain stuck in the 20th century."

"We knew the referendum was a possibility, but I remain confident that a majority of Idahoans support education reform in Idaho," Luna said in a statement Wednesday evening. "This isn't the answer to the challenges we face in education today. The burden of proof should be on those who want to defend the status quo, not on those who want to change it."

Luna has already named a team to start implementing the changes.

Idaho Education Association union president Sherri Wood, a foe of the bills, said she's convinced voters will turn in droves against Luna's changes after experiencing their effects starting this year when the legislation goes into effect.

"Unfortunately, we won't have a chance to vote on the laws until November 2012, but by then, Idahoans will have seen ample evidence on just how damaging these laws are," Wood said.

Wood's union has also challenged Luna in state court over a key part of the reforms, asking a judge to declare unconstitutional those portions of the new laws that do away with some teacher job protections and collective bargaining rights.

A separate push also seeks to recall Luna, too, but organizers Wednesday didn't provide any update on the progress of gathering signatures for that. Recall proponents face long odds: In their push for an Aug. 30 special election, the group must submit 158,107 valid signatures.

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Los Angeles County education officials OK Compton charter school

Los Angeles Times

By: Teresa Watanabe

May 26, 2011

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-0526-compton-charter-20110526.0.1165869.story>

Celerity Educational Group's petition to open a campus was rejected by Compton's school board. But its successful appeal to L.A. County education officials means that a kindergarten through fifth-grade campus will operate in a neighborhood church.

Compton parents, stymied in their efforts to petition for sweeping changes at their low-performing elementary school, now have another choice: They can send their children to a newly approved charter campus instead.

Celerity Educational Group announced Wednesday that its petition to start a school in Compton, which was rejected by the city school board, has been approved on appeal by Los Angeles County education officials. The group, which operates four schools throughout the area, plans to open the Compton program this fall for 220 children in kindergarten through fifth grade at a neighborhood church.

Parents said they were jubilant to finally have another choice for their children besides [McKinley Elementary School](#), where standardized test scores are rising but still rank in the bottom 10% of elementary schools statewide.

"This just shows when parents join together, we can win," said Raquel Benitez, a McKinley mother of four.

The announcement marks the latest twist in the long battle over McKinley. The school has become a closely watched test case for the state's new Parent Trigger law, which allows parents at low-performing schools to force staff and curriculum changes, school closure or conversion to a charter school. Charters are publicly financed, independently run schools.

Parent Revolution, a Los Angeles educational advocacy group, helped organize McKinley parents to submit the state's first Parent Trigger petition last December, asking that school management be turned over to Celerity. But the Compton school board rejected the petitions, saying that they were not properly drawn up. The group sued and a Los Angeles judge tentatively agreed, in part, with the board. Further arguments are scheduled for next month.

As the parent group faltered on the legal front, Celerity moved forward with a separate and ultimately successful charter petition. Celerity founder and chief Vielka McFarlane said the new school will be named Celerity Sirius — after the brightest star in the night sky.

"We want to be a beacon for the community," said McFarlane, an English-Spanish bilingual immigrant from Panama who was a teacher and administrator in the Los Angeles Unified School District before opening her first charter school six years ago.

"You have a human right to have your kids aspire to something more than high school dropout," she told parents at a news conference at Church of the Redeemer, the site of the new school.

Among Celerity's three schools with standardized test score data, all rank in the top 10% of schools with similar populations — largely low-income Latino and African American students. Its highest-performing school, Celerity Troika, scored 932 on a scale of 1,000 last year and its lowest-performing school, Celerity Nascent, improved its test scores by more than 100 points in the last three years, reaching 782 last year.

McKinley, by contrast, scored 684 last year and ranks in the bottom 20% of schools with similar populations.

McFarlane credited Celerity student gains in part to a "labor-intensive" system of individualized instruction guided by data on student weakness and extra support through after-school programs and specialized staff.

Mass transfers from McKinley could reduce its student population by half, raising questions about the school's future. Citing budget cuts, the Compton school board considered closing McKinley this year but selected other schools instead.

Parents said they still hoped for a court victory affirming their petition to bring Celerity to McKinley. But if they fail, they said, they intend to be first in line to enroll their children in the charter.

"I'm excited because I know my daughter is going to get the education she needs and deserves," said Shemika Murphy, whose child is in second grade.

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