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NATIONAL NEWS

Academics Find Common Standards Fit for College

Education Week

By: Catherine Gewertz

August 25, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/25/02collegeready_ep.h31.html?tkn=ZYRFZBmBTwYnlQ0be1BqsEDm%2BDRP30slpbs1&cmp=clp-edweek

Instructors of entry-level college courses consider the common standards in mathematics and English/language arts good reflections of the skills students must master to be successful in courses in a range of disciplines, according to a survey released Thursday.

The study, "[Reaching the Goal.](#)" aims to verify a key premise of the academic standards that have been adopted by all but five states: that they prepare students for college by defining the skills and knowledge that are crucial to success in entry-level coursework. Although college instructors served on the panels that crafted the standards, the new survey is believed to be the only study to test that premise by putting the question directly to higher-education faculty.

"It suggests strong support for the validity of the common-core standards, in terms of their applicability to college courses and their importance, and the appropriate level of challenge for students to be successful," said Michael W. Kirst, a professor emeritus of education at Stanford University who focuses on college-readiness issues and serves on the board of directors of the research group that produced the report. "Nobody has cross-checked it with the actual people who teach these courses, until now."

Rating the Common Core

Researchers asked college instructors whether the common standards in English/language arts and mathematics are applicable to the entry-level courses they teach. Instructors who found them applicable then rated the standards, and substandards, on a scale of 1 to 4, from least important to most important for students to master in order to succeed in the course. Survey participants rated a total of 113 standards and substandards in English/language arts and 200 in math.

In conducting the study, a team led by David T. Conley, the chief executive officer of the [Educational Policy Improvement Center](#), in Eugene, Ore., posed two types of questions to the instructors of 1,897 courses at 944 two- and four-year colleges across the country.

First, the "applicability" question: Do the high school standards reflect material that will be covered or reviewed, or considered a prerequisite, in your course?

If instructors answered yes, they went on to the "importance" questions, rating on a scale of 1 to 4 how crucial mastery of each broad "strand" or "conceptual category" of standards—and scores of standards and substatements within them—is to students'

success in their courses.

Across Disciplines

The instructors in the study come not just from the math and English/language arts disciplines. They teach courses in other general education areas such as science and social studies, as well as courses often associated with career pathways in health care, computer technology, and business management. All were asked to review both the math and English/language arts standards, on the theory that many skills articulated there were meant to cut across the disciplines.

Standards in English/language arts earned strong ratings for importance, with every area except one rated between 3 and 3.3. The math standards received somewhat lower ratings, mostly between 2.6 and 3, a difference that might be attributable, Mr. Conley said, to their greater degree of specialization.

Digging deeper into the results yields variations that shed light on the relevance and importance instructors from the different disciplines place on the 300-plus ideas they evaluated. Those variations, Mr. Conley said, can inform how curriculum is designed for the standards and how they are taught and tested.

“When we start thinking about what to teach and what to test, the variations become far more important than the generalizations,” said Mr. Conley. Those variations suggest that even students who don’t master every standard can excel in college, he said.

“Are you better off with a strong core of knowledge? Of course,” Mr. Conley said. “The more you know, the more options you have in college. But even if you don’t master all the standards, you still have good options.”

The math standards to earn the highest and most interdisciplinary applicability ratings were those in the “mathematical practices,” which include skills such as applying math knowledge to everyday problems. Even some English/language arts instructors found those standards relevant to their courses, with two in 10 giving the thumbs-up. Six in 10 of those in social science did so as well, along with three-quarters or more of those in the other disciplines.

In English/language arts, the speaking and listening skills were the ones seen as the most highly applicable by instructors across the disciplines. Standards in literary reading got somewhat lower applicability ratings. But those focusing on informational reading were seen as highly relevant. Instructors from non-English/language arts courses, in particular, saw the standards for reading in specific disciplines, such as science and social studies, as applicable to their courses.

Prioritizing Skills

When it came to rating the importance of the standards and statements within the standards, some were seen as far more important than others.

Within the speaking and listening standards, for instance, instructors said it was very important for students to be able to “come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study [and] explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research ... to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.” The instructors placed less value on students’ ability to “evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.”

Within math practices, raters placed the most value on “making sense of problems and persevering in solving them” and the least on “looking for and expressing regularity in repeated reasoning,” though both still received above-average-importance ratings. Within the geometry standard, instructors placed more importance on using volume formulas to solve problems than on the ability to prove that all circles are similar.

The appraisals of the math standards by instructors in varied fields are “bound to raise the question” of how much math students need to succeed in various college majors and fields of work, said Mr. Kirst of Stanford, a question that has been debated by experts.

“Many subjects don’t require math beyond Algebra 2,” Mr. Kirst said. “This [study] expands the dialogue and perspective on that to many other teachers. Math teachers want everybody to know a lot of math, but they’re not the ones that have a handle on what is needed in all these other fields.”

Missing Dimensions

Another central idea of the standards—that they are rigorous enough to prepare students for college—was explored in an optional question at the end of the survey. Ninety-six percent of the responding instructors agreed that the standards were at a level of rigor sufficient for preparation for their courses.

But even as the study buttressed key ideas about the standards’ reflection of college readiness, some of its strongest language was reserved for areas they do not cover. Mr. Conley, widely known for his work detailing strategies and habits of mind that are important for success in college, such as persistence and study skills, cautioned against viewing the common standards as a complete recipe for college preparation.

“Defining a set of standards as ‘college and career ready’ that overlook ... dimensions beyond content knowledge will result in assuming that students who have achieved a particular score on the common assessments [of the standards] are fully ready for college and career studies when, in fact, they may possess only a subset of the knowledge and skills, strategies and techniques necessary to be fully ready for postsecondary success,” he and his co-authors write in the study.

Donna Ekal, the associate provost for undergraduate studies at the University of Texas at El Paso, agreed that students’ mastery of academic standards is a misleading gauge of their readiness for college or work. It’s important to know what college instructors consider crucial to success in their courses, she said, but researchers should also ask students what skills proved pivotal to their college success.

“If you asked students, they would certainly say content is important, but we hear an awful lot, too, about time management and about unrealistic expectations. Many students expect college to be like a 13th year of high school,” said Ms. Ekal, whose 23,000-student campus has worked for 20 years with local school districts, city officials, and the community college to align K-12 work with college.

“I think it would be especially important to ask the students that did well in high school and came to college and weren’t so successful, what was the disconnect?”

Creating assessments that are informed by college instructors’ views involves an inherent “tension” in ensuring that the tests cover what is important to learn in high school, without shortchanging the more narrowly focused math and literacy skills that meet higher education’s definition of what’s required for success in entry-level, credit-bearing courses, said Michael Cohen, the president of Achieve, a Washington-based group that has worked with colleges and K-12 to shape academic expectations and tests for states in its American Diploma Project network.

A key tenet of the common assessments, which two large groups of states are designing for the common standards, is that colleges could support their use for course-placement decisions. Achieve is a project-management partner of one of those two state consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career, or PARCC.

Achieve’s research showed that college-placement tests in math tend to focus heavily on algebra, since that is often the first credit-bearing course in college, Mr. Cohen said. Consequently, a high school math test designed for the common standards will have to focus sufficiently on algebra to predict success in first-year, credit-bearing courses, but will also have to include other areas of math included in the standards, he said. Number and quantity, for instance, was an area of math that received as high an applicability rating from the college instructors in the study as algebra did. Statistics and probability was close behind.

As school districts and states work to reshape curricula and tests to reflect the common standards, college instructors’ views of the relative importance of the standards—and more narrowly focused goals within each standard—can help them prioritize, Mr. Kirst said.

“This is very useful for state policymakers like me,” said Mr. Kirst, the president of the California state board of education. “We can’t cover all the standards in the common core equally. We cannot test all of them equally. As you look through what people think is more or less important, it gives you some guidance as to what may be the things you have to teach and assess in depth versus those you assess in less depth or not at all.”

Coverage of “deeper learning” that will prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world is supported in part by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, at www.hewlett.org.

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Virtual Education Targets Rise of Autism

Education Week

By: Michelle R. Davis

August 24, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-autism.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-autism.h31.html?tkn=RTNFZXCYDRvfAaaEeZSkGGJV9Y7ZPY5YxF2o&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH)

[tkn=RTNFZXCYDRvfAaaEeZSkGGJV9Y7ZPY5YxF2o&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-autism.h31.html?tkn=RTNFZXCYDRvfAaaEeZSkGGJV9Y7ZPY5YxF2o&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH)

When bullying in her teenage daughter’s Maryland public school became too intense, Ruth Zanoni decided to try home-schooling, using online education as a supplement.

Ms. Zanoni’s daughter, now 14, has Asperger syndrome, often described as a high-functioning form of autism. She was academically advanced in some subjects, such as writing and literature, but was sometimes overwhelmed by sensory stimulus. And her lack of social skills made her a target for bullying.

At home in Howard County, Ms. Zanoni’s daughter did well pursuing math through videos from Khan Academy, a not-for-profit provider of online educational videos and activities, and working on her social skills using an online role-playing game, but she faltered taking French and then Italian online. Ms. Zanoni said she had to work hard to keep her daughter on task online and felt she needed additional face-to-face support. Ms. Zanoni eventually found a private school that specialized in working with students like her daughter.

“There’s a huge value to online education [for students with autism], but it depends on how it’s introduced and the nature of the

person,” Ms. Zanoni said.

For some students with autism, online education can be the right fit, taking away the sensory overload and social stigma that can occur in a brick-and-mortar school and allowing them to pursue subjects they’re passionate about, above and beyond what they’d get in the classroom.

For students who aren’t as high-functioning, lacking language and motor skills, more-traditional online classes often aren’t an option. But many students are now using a growing number of apps on computers and particularly iPads to help improve such functions as social skills and communication. In addition, new technologies for early detection, speech therapy, and research into autism, a complex developmental brain disorder, are being developed.

Schools and those who provide intervention for such students are seeking out that technology and the tools it can offer as they’re seeing the number of students with autism rise. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there was a 1,700 percent increase in the number of students with autism in schools from the 1991-92 school year through the 2001-02 school year, compared with a 30 percent increase among all other disabilities. Currently, one in 110 U.S. children are diagnosed with autism by the time they are 8 years old, according to the New York City advocacy group [Autism Speaks](#).

“A lot of this [new technology] is preliminary and promising, but it’s not a silver bullet,” said Matthew S. Goodwin, the director of clinical research at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab](#), in Cambridge, Mass. “It’s not going to cure autism, but we’re on the precipice of a revolution.”

'Sensory Issues'

At Herndon, Va.-based K12 Inc., which operates 47 online charter schools across the country, about 12 percent of the special education students it serves have an autism diagnosis, said Jenny Kendall, K12’s director of special programs. The majority of them are high-functioning, and for many of them, online education is a “perfect fit,” she said.

“They have sensory issues and [in a brick-and-mortar school] you’re going to add bells and crowds and hallway changes and the noise, which is so traumatic for a child who needs a calm, consistent routine,” Ms. Kendall said.

Online education allows such students to control their environment. Those students are also often “hyper-focused” in certain areas, Ms. Kendall noted, and may want to go above and beyond in that academic area, which online instruction allows them to do.

K12 does provide online methods of socialization, such as an internal social-networking site, that is monitored by adults to promote positive interaction. Students with autism may also be involved in teacher-moderated social-skills groups using Web-based conferencing, Ms. Kendall said. If additional face-to-face social intervention is needed, the school may contract with a local agency to provide it, she said.

But Katharina I. Boser, a cognitive-development psychologist who is the co-chair, along with Mr. Goodwin, of the Innovative Technology for Autism Advisory Board for Autism Speaks, said the success of online education with such students depends on how severely a student is affected. In addition, many of the socialization issues that take place in a regular school environment may still be a problem online, she said.

For example, a student who is focused on a particular subject and doesn’t know how to discuss that topic without going on at length in a socially unacceptable way may do the same thing online. “Through written text, they’ll go on and on, but they won’t be able to culminate their ideas or provide proper responses,” Ms. Boser said.

But because communication can be more closely monitored online, a teacher may be able to guide the student more easily, Ms. Boser said.

Attention on Apps

For those who don’t have the skills needed to operate in a full-blown online classroom, the use of online applications, or apps, is becoming more popular. Those apps can, among many other uses, help students learn their addresses, phone numbers, and other basic information, use games to improve balance and coordination, aid communication, and even prepare for a trip to the dentist.

Judith Ursitti’s 7-year-old son Jack didn’t speak at all until about a year ago, after he got an iPad. Now, he’s using programs on his iPad to enhance his growing vocabulary, help him communicate, and play.

“It’s a constant tool,” said Ms. Ursitti. “When we put an iPad in his hand, he immediately got it.”

His progress wasn’t magical, though, and it came with support from Ms. Ursitti, teachers, and therapists.

Before receiving his iPad, Jack communicated using a flip-book he wore around his neck, which contained pictures he could point to showing what he wanted or needed.

“It was cumbersome and it was not the coolest thing in the world,” said Ms. Ursitti, who is also the director of state-government affairs for Autism Speaks.

When Jack got an iPad, he found he could easily scroll through pictures for the ones he wanted. At school, Jack uses the iPad to communicate, and it keeps a schedule of his therapies and activities.

Though Jack's fine-motor skills aren't sophisticated enough for him to type, he uses a \$1.99 app to drag and drop words and letters, often showing Ms. Ursitti that he knows how to spell and use language in ways she was unaware of. "It's another avenue into his mind and abilities that we didn't have before," she said.

Experts and parents say using apps and other online tools helps maintain the attention of students with autism.

Kyle D. Epps, a speech-language pathologist for Progressus Therapy, a Baltimore-based company that provides therapies to school districts, who works with students in the 680,000-student Los Angeles Unified School District, said students with autism often seem more interested in therapies offered through technology than more traditional methods. With the use of technology, Mr. Epps said, he sees "a huge increase in production and keeping their attention."

He's used, for example, an "eye contact" app that displays a person's face. A student with autism looks into the person's eyes to see a number and report it so the therapist knows the student is looking in the right spot, allowing him or her to get comfortable with eye contact.

While "the technology is only as good as the therapist," Mr. Epps said, it appears to be a "motivating tool." He said some parents are now requesting iPads as part of their children's individualized education programs, or IEPs, the federally mandated plans for serving students with disabilities.

In addition, some states are starting to look at those tools as important therapies. New York state is considering legislation that would require insurance companies to cover expenses related to "augmentative communication devices" for children and adults who have disabilities that hinder language skills.

'Active Collaborators'

More apps are in the making.

In cooperation with Autism Speaks and the [Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism](#), based in Framingham, Mass., the technology company Hewlett-Packard has launched a [Hacking Autism initiative](#) to develop new, free apps. The Palo Alto, Calif.-based company is seeking idea submissions, and experts will select some for a "hackathon" that brings together scientists and the community that supports children with autism to jump-start development.

Many new technological tools are already in development. Mr. Goodwin, the director of clinical research at the MIT Media Lab, is working on four different projects that could provide, for example, social cues to students with autism, track a student's stress level, and help provide early diagnosis for children with autism.

A whole range of new technology is on the horizon to aid students with autism, Mr. Goodwin said, and those innovations are not being developed in a vacuum. Students with autism, their families, and those who work to improve the skills of such children are providing feedback to enhance those technological tools.

"They are active collaborators," Mr. Goodwin said. "We're augmenting already-available technologies and taking advantage of the interest that people have in them."

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FLORIDA NEWS

Jeb Bush, local education advocates, Orange board chair to discuss education reform

Orlando Sentinel

By: Staff

August, 25 2011

http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2011/08/jeb-bush-local-education-advocates-orange-board-chair-to-discuss-education-reform.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29

Ok, this could be interesting.

An event next month is going to put former Gov. Jeb Bush at the same table with an Orange County education funding advocate, the county's school board chair, the founder of a national charter school network and a Tampa teacher. And give them all microphones.

The occasion is the ["Education Reform" iteration of the Florida Forward Conversations About the Future discussion series](#). It is sponsored by the Orlando Sentinel and UCF Metropolitan Center For Regional Studies, Sentinel opinion editor Mike Lafferty will

moderate, negating the chance of another awkward kiss between Orange County School Board Chair Bill Sublette and Sentinel columnist Scott Maxwell, who moderated a panel of local school board chairs this week.

Want to go? It'll be held over lunch September 20 at the DoubleTree Hotel Downtown Orlando (yes, the former Sonesta) for \$20 a head. The web site taking reservations is closed, so call 407-420-5599 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) 407-420-5599 [end_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) if you want to go. Proceeds will be donated to the Orlando Sentinel Family Fund.

Kathleen Oropeza, one of the invited panelists and a co-founder of Fund Education Now, said she expects a "thoughtful discussion." Though the event will be at its most interesting if all the panelists say what they're really thinking.

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Duval School Board to review its magnet program

Florida Times-Union

By: Topher Sandersjacksonville.com [Copyright 2011 The Florida Times-Union. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.](#)

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<http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2011-08-25/story/duval-school-board-review-its-magnet-program#ixzz1W8YnqelQ>

The board will take up issues related to the schools next month.

August 25, 2011 - 08:18pm Duval School Board to review its magnet program Next month the Duval County School Board plans to review the district's magnet programs, looking at things like the neighborhood preference policy and accelerated programs.

Sally Hague, Duval's executive director of School Choice/Pupil Assignment, will present the board with five issues related to magnet programs she feels the district should give thought to. The board will take up the discussion during a workshop on Sept. 15.

One of the issues, the neighborhood preference policy, is what actually prompted the larger discussion.

Neighborhood preference is largely an issue at Julia Landon Middle School, where about 39 percent of the students come from the school's surrounding neighborhood. Dedicated magnet schools like Landon were designed to bring in students from all over the county, not have a concentration from one neighborhood.

The disproportionate number of neighborhood students at Landon could affect the geographic balance at schools like Stanton College Preparatory School and Paxon School for Advanced Studies because many of Landon's students go on to those schools.

Board member Tommy Hazouri has been pushing for a review of the neighborhood preference policy for more than six months because he fears the large numbers of neighborhood students at Landon could begin to push out students from other parts of the county.

But Hazouri said a broader look at magnet programs is also needed.

"It's absolutely imperative that we review our magnet programs and our neighborhood schools and accelerated programs, because either we have the goal of returning to high quality neighborhood schools or we're going to maintain tiers of education," he said.

Hague will also discuss discontinuing magnet programs at a small number of schools that are overutilized but have reached a satisfactory level of diversity.

Programs like the one at Chimney Lakes Elementary School would be potential candidates for a review because if the magnet program was eliminated the school would still be about 91 percent full and would remain diverse.

Another issue will be giving all of the district's acceleration programs the same deadline. Right now mature acceleration programs, such as Paxon's IB program, have firm application deadlines in January. But the new accelerated programs accept students almost to the beginning of the school year because they are working to build their numbers.

Eventually syncing the deadlines for the programs will help ensure that parents don't view the programs as a tiered system, seeing the older programs as better because of their more stringent deadlines.

"I think that's the only way we're really going to build the reputation of the other programs," Hague said.

Hague would also like to reignite a program that allowed students who lived in the boundaries of four adjacent schools to attend any of the four schools. The Inspirations Village program, started in 2006, includes Brentwood, R.L. Brown, John E. Ford and Andrew Robinson elementary schools. After a grant for the program dried up, it lost momentum in recent years. Parents in the area aren't aware of the options the Village affords them, Hague said.

"In my opinion this was one of the neatest things we've done," she said. "I just think this needs to be refreshed."

Ford presents its own problem in that the school doesn't take new students after first grade because it is a Montessori and Spanish immersion program. Parents who move into the Ford attendance area with a student in the second grade or higher are told their child can't attend the school.

"It's a very difficult thing to explain to parents," Hague said.

A possible fix would be to make Ford a dedicated magnet, she said.

The last scheduled discussion point will be a review of the fee-based programs for pre-kindergarten at both J. Allen Axson and Ford elementary schools. The question is whether the fee-based pre-K blocks any students and families who can't afford to pay the fee.

Students in the pre-K get continuity preference to advance to the schools' kindergarten grades. The discussion will focus on whether the pre-K programs are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse.

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Gov. Rick Scott: Let's compete for \$100 million Race to Top grant for young kids

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

August 25, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-early-childhood-race-to-the-top-20110825.0.6873146.story>

But lawmakers must accept other federal money before qualifying for Race to the Top grant

Florida plans to compete for \$100 million in the federal government's latest Race to the Top program, assuming the Florida Legislature is willing to accept other federal money it had previously rejected.

To apply for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, which is designed to improve the care and education of young children, states must be taking part in a federal home-visiting program meant to prevent child abuse.

The Florida Legislature had rejected that home-visiting grant money because it is now part of President Barack Obama's health-care overhaul law, which the state's Republican leaders view as unconstitutional and are challenging in court.

Lawmakers turned down, gave back or refused to apply for more than \$50 million in federal grants tied to the law.

Scott, however, has decided to ask them to reconsider the home-visiting grant, said spokesman Amy Graham.

"We do plan to apply for the Race to the Top Grant," Graham said in an email. "We are hopeful that the Legislature will grant the spending authority" for the home-visiting grant.

The governor must sign the Race to the Top application, which is due in Washington, D.C., by Oct. 19.

Because the home-visiting grant, which Florida had accepted previously, was "not for implementation of Obamacare," Scott was never opposed to it, Graham said, referring to the Affordable Care Act.

In fact, she added, Scott asked for the budget authority to get the grant money during the legislative session this spring, and lawmakers denied that.

Scott wants the Legislative Budget Commission to consider the new request for the home-visiting grant at its next meeting Sept. 7, Graham said.

"We're presently evaluating the budget amendment submitted by the Governor's Office, but we have not received any notification from the Governor's Office of a formal intent to apply for this new phase of the Race to the Top grant," said Erin Rock, a spokesman for the Florida House of Representatives.

A spokesman for Senate President Mike Haridopolos could not be reached for comment.

Early-childhood advocates would be delighted if Florida applied for the new Race to the Top competition. They see it as a way for Florida to boost existing programs, better train early-childhood teachers and coordinate the often-fractured systems that work with babies and young children.

The grant "gives Florida unprecedented possibilities for investing in an infrastructure that can produce a generation that is happier, healthier and smarter than any that came before. We are thrilled to have this opportunity!" said Mimi Graham, director of Florida State University's Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, in an email.

Graham said investing in early-childhood programs is sound fiscal policy, "critical to Florida's future workforce" and much needed in a state where "ranking in child health and well-being remains dismal."

Florida won \$700 million in the first Race to the Top competition, a federal effort to push states to reform public education.

The new competition focuses on young children before they start formal schooling, with a particular emphasis on "promoting school readiness for children with high needs."

The U.S. Department of Education plans to announce winners in December. It has \$500 million to divvy up and has said awards will range from \$50 million to \$100 million, depending on state population and plans. Florida is eligible for the largest award.

Thirty-six other states and the District of Columbia had said previously that they planned to compete for the money.

"These funds would allow Florida to further improve the quality of school readiness programs, the state's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program, the Head Start program and school-aged (or after school) programs," said Scott's office in an email. "While it makes sense for Florida to join all of the other eligible states in taking advantage of these funds, it is important that everyone understands these are not recurring funds and should not be relied on to create new government programs/positions."

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STATE NEWS

Nevada: Shifting demographics demand greater urgency in improving schools

Las Vegas Sun

By: J. Patrick Coolican

August 26, 2011

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2011/aug/26/shifting-demographics-demand-greater-urgency-impro/>

The news last week that Hispanics are Nevada's largest group of students was worrisome. OK, that sounds offensive, and not something you'd expect from me.

But here's what I mean: Nevada's achievement gap — the chasm between Asians and whites and blacks and Hispanics in academic success — isn't like the narrow strip between the platform and the train. It's more like one of the great canyons of the West.

According to a June report from Education Week, just 29.6 of our Hispanic students of the class of 2008 graduated with a regular diploma. Read that number again.

It's true there are many ways to determine graduation rates, and Education Week's are lower than other methods. But Pedro Martinez, Clark County Schools deputy superintendent, notes that nearly half of incoming seniors — not just Hispanics — won't graduate next spring because they don't have the credits and/or haven't passed the standardized High School Proficiency Exam, while nearly one-third have already dropped out. "Not acceptable," Martinez says.

State Sen. Ruben Kihuen, a Las Vegas Democrat, tells me he was shocked to hear the new numbers among Hispanics, until he reflected on the fact that half his old pals from high school never graduated.

The numbers for other demographics aren't great either, with 63 percent of Asians, 33 percent of blacks and 55.8 percent of whites graduating.

But if our largest student group is Hispanic, and fewer than one-third of our Hispanic students are graduating, that means Nevada and Las Vegas in particular are being flooded with high school dropouts — low-skill workers of whom we already have too many.

During the boom years, this wasn't such a problem, as these workers could find jobs in construction or the service industries. Indeed, Hispanics had the lowest unemployment rate in the United States before the recession.

All that's finished. And, if you want to know why the Great Recession won't truly end here in Southern Nevada for many years, this is it: The construction economy is dead and will be for years, the resorts have learned to do more with less, and we're stuck with hundreds of thousands of workers who have few skills and no education.

They're the equivalent of workers in Akron or Cleveland after steel went south and then overseas.

This is why we went from Boom Town to Neo-Rust Belt in just a few years. Consider the difference in earnings between those with education and those without: In 2009, for adults 25 to 34, the median worker with a bachelor's degree made \$45,000, or more than twice the median of someone without a high school degree.

Kihuen says the recession is actually compounding the dropout problem because with one or more parents out of work many households are leaning on teenagers to help put food on the table; this in turn is causing some to perform poorly or drop out of school altogether.

Thankfully, Clark County Schools Superintendent Dwight Jones and his team recognize the crisis and have a plan to address it, which they unveiled this month to the School Board.

Martinez says they've asked each high school principal to put in place an immediate crisis plan to deal with the 10,000 students who won't graduate without significant intervention. Each student will have an individual plan and be matched with a teacher, counselor or assistant principal to get them up to speed so they can graduate.

But that's short term, while this is a long-term problem requiring a long-term solution.

The proficiency exam is mostly based on ninth grade-level work, meaning that we have a lot of high school students, like as many as half, who can't do ninth grade work. Great.

Martinez says the key problem is that too many students aren't exposed to academic rigor. The district hopes to phase out remedial classes so that all students are exposed to tougher material. In the short term they'll move students who are succeeding in remedial classes into regular classes.

"Pre-algebra isn't going to help them pass the proficiency exam," Martinez says.

While asking more of students and teachers, the district will offer extra help in the form of after-school programs and other interventions.

Staff will also use the Preliminary SAT to identify students who scored well and should be taking Advanced Placement classes — these are the tough classes where students can earn college credit — and strongly encourage these students and their families to go big.

But obviously the problems start earlier than high school, so the district will be giving more training to middle school teachers, so their students will be ready for high school. But the problem starts even earlier than that, which is why the district is flooding the zone on literacy, because there's basically no learning without it.

These solutions will help all students, but Hispanic students especially because they suffer the greatest achievement gap.

Solving this education crisis is the best — maybe the only — real plan for economic development. Given the continued growth of our Hispanic population, as Kihuen says, "An investment in our Latino students is an investment in the state of Nevada."

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New York Court Sides with Union in Teacher Evaluation Dispute

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

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[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/08/post_9.html?](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/08/post_9.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+StateEdwatch+%28State+EdWatch%29)

[utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+StateEdwatch+%28State+EdWatch%29](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/08/post_9.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+StateEdwatch+%28State+EdWatch%29)

The difficult business of devising a method to tie teacher evaluations to student test scores is on display in New York, where a judge ruled this week that the state Board of Regents overstepped the boundaries set by a new law, in crafting such a system.

Albany County Supreme Court Justice [Michael Lynch](#), ruled that the board had gone too far in some of its specifications for how teachers would be judged based on growth in student achievement.

At issue are regulations adopted earlier this year by the Board of Regents, and whether they conflicted with a 2010 law approved by the state legislature, which created the basis for a new evaluation system.

That law undergirded New York's application in the federal Race to the Top competition; the state ultimately walked away with a \$700 million award.

The law called for 40 percent of a teacher's annual review to be based on student achievement. The first 20 percent was to be based on student growth data, as measured by state tests, or comparable measures for subjects that aren't assessed by the state.

The dispute [centers](#) on the second 20 percent. The regulations approved by the Board of Regents allowed districts to use state test results for that portion of the evaluation, too. The union sued, noting that the law required that the second 20 percent be based on locally selected measures of achievement.

The judge [agreed](#), ruling that the same student growth measures could not be used for all 40 percent of a teacher's evaluation. Data from the state assessments could be used in the second 20 percent if it was used as a "distinctly different measure of

student achievement," he ruled, as long as the measure is developed locally through collective bargaining.

The judge also said that the state's scoring system could not allow teachers to be deemed ineffective based on test scores alone, rather than other parts of the evaluation process. The state commissioner of education must create a system in which the non-test score parts of the evaluation "have a meaningful impact" in the educator's overall score, even in cases of poor student achievement, Lynch concluded.

The New York State Education Department has said it will appeal the decision.

State [commissioner of education](#) John B. King, Jr., said the court upheld provisions requiring the timely appeals of teacher evaluation. Doing so will help districts "avoid having to pay ineffective teachers during lengthy appeals processes," the department said in a statement.

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Indianapolis Public Schools board votes to sue over takeovers

Indianapolis Star

By: Scott Elliott

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<http://www.indystar.com/article/20110826/LOCAL18/108260328/IPS-board-votes-sue-over-takeovers>

State panel expected to OK list; schools will enter transition period

Next school year, four Indianapolis Public Schools will be among the first to be taken over by the state of Indiana, if the state Board of Education -- as expected -- approves that recommendation Monday.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Bennett said Thursday he will recommend state takeover for Donnan Middle School and Manual, Arlington Community and Howe Community high schools, along with Roosevelt High School in Gary.

In response, the Indianapolis Public School Board -- at Superintendent Eugene White's urging -- voted 4-3 Thursday night to sue the state Department of Education.

Two other IPS schools -- Broad Ripple Magnet High School for the Arts and Washington Community High School -- will not be taken over. Instead, they will be paired with "lead partner" organizations to assist with specific needs, while IPS retains control.

"Our children deserve better, and it's time to do it," Bennett said in unveiling his recommendations. "Our intent is to use everything we have in this state to restore these schools to what they should be for the children in these communities."

If the state Board of Education approves, the schools slated for state takeover will enter a "transition" year in which the management organizations, working under one-year contracts, will learn about them and prepare to take control in 2012. They will then run the schools for the next four years and receive the tax dollars that otherwise would have gone to the district.

The Department of Education denied an appeal from White to remove Arlington, Howe and Washington community high schools and Broad Ripple from probation. White had not appealed keeping Manual and Donnan on probation.

White contends it is unfair to include the community schools -- which serve middle and high school students -- because if only high school scores had been considered, all four would have made enough progress to avoid state intervention.

White also thought the decision was unfair because each of those schools have made gains in high school graduation rates since switching to community schools -- a factor the state did not take into consideration.

"Those four schools should not have any restrictions on them, and they should be off probation," White said at Thursday night's board meeting. "I don't think we are going to get a fair objective review of that from the IDOE. We want a third opinion. We don't believe these schools were treated fairly."

White also told IPS board members the lawsuit can be handled by district lawyers at no extra cost.

Bennett responded to White's arguments by saying there were 140 schools statewide with blended grade configurations, including 20 that were on probation, but only the IPS schools failed to make enough progress to avoid intervention.

"These are the same metrics we have had for many years," he said. "I think the way we work ourselves out of this problem is by thinking about how we educate, not how we litigate."

Under Bennett's plan, each takeover would be run by an outside organization, beginning with the 2012-13 school year. The organizations and the schools they would manage are:

Charter Schools USA, which would run Donnan, Manual and Howe. The Florida-based company operates 29 charter schools in Florida, Georgia and Louisiana.

EdPower, an Indianapolis-based nonprofit, would manage Arlington. EdPower operates the Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School, an Indianapolis charter school.

Linking Donnan and Manual with a common operator in Charter Schools USA would "ensure curriculum, assessments and supports are vertically articulated across grades 7 through 12," according to state Department of Education documents, to "address the number of students arriving at Manual High School below grade level."

Bennett said the companies and nonprofits selected to work with schools would be expected to make strong improvements.

"The relationship between the Indiana Department of Education, turnaround school operators and lead partners will be one of high expectations and clear metrics for accountability."

And those gains will need to be protected, he said. Bennett promised to ask lawmakers next year to add to state law a mechanism allowing him to prevent schools from returning to their districts after state takeover unless the districts can demonstrate they are capable of sustaining improvements.

But Bennett also said he was not ready to define -- at least specifically -- what will qualify as success for turnaround operators.

Across the district, Thursday's announcement was met with a mix of emotions among students, teachers and administrators.

At Donnan, first-year Principal Brian Burke delivered the news to his staff at a teachers meeting after school.

Burke moved into the school just a few months ago, replaced two-thirds of the faculty and has spent the past three weeks trying to whip the struggling school into shape. Despite a challenging student body -- 80 percent are poor, one-third have special needs, several come from other schools they were kicked out of -- optimism has marked the first three weeks of school.

But as he stood in the library and delivered the state's verdict to his staff, some of that optimism seemed to leave the room.

There were groans and, from one teacher, a bemused chuckle. But mostly there was silence. And then questions.

One educator asked whether teachers still worked for IPS.

"Right now you do," Burke replied.

"Is there any option, if we do a great job this year, that we could get our school back?" another asked.

"That's another great question," Burke said.

"I think that train has left the station," interjected Assistant Principal Lora Feezer.

In the end, Burke said he knew nothing about Charter Schools USA, when its people would arrive or what the new working relationship would be.

"I know the emotions are probably high -- they are with me, obviously," he said. "But I don't know what this means. I don't know what this looks like. But I do know what we are doing here is the right thing for the kids. And I think that should win out when it is all said and done."

Teacher Canary Howard-Smith, who has 43 years in IPS, said she thinks Burke already has the school headed in the right direction.

"We have a winning team here," she said. "I was hopeful that we could do this ourselves."

Students who heard about the news during after-school cheerleading practice were not happy at the thought of more changes.

"We're just getting to know the teachers, and they are going to take them away again," said Ausjanique Holloway-Lee, an eighth-grader. "IPS. It's just crazy."

Richard Page, vice president of development for Charter Schools USA, said the company hoped to import its model if the state Board of Education approves, but that it would bring a keen eye on its initial school visits.

"We're going to want to keep things that are working and build upon them," he said.

Although the company has not worked outside the Southeastern U.S. or operated a traditional public school before, it has experience managing urban charter schools in Florida's Miami-Dade and Broward counties.

"Many of our research-based processes we will look to implement into the instructional model of the schools," Page said. "We recognize there will be areas we will have to modify because these will not be charter schools."

The challenge is similar for EdPower, which will take on a large traditional high school in Arlington after running a smaller charter high school in Tindley.

"I haven't the foggiest idea what they've been doing at Arlington," said Marcus Robinson, CEO of EdPower. "I imagine they've been working as hard as they can. We've been in the Northeast corridor for almost a decade. We would reach out to our community partners to craft a joint plan and a joint vision for Arlington, and we would like to do it with IPS and the Indiana Department of Education at the table."

At Arlington, reaction was mixed.

"I don't think they should use a private management company," said Valerie Murphy, 61, grandmother and legal guardian of a 17-year-old junior. "They made a mess doing that with the welfare program, and I can imagine the mess they'll make with the schools."

But some students thought giving someone else a chance to turn around the school was a good idea.

"They might get better results," said sophomore J'Sjona Cole, 15, "if they give us more time to learn and more time in school."

Senior Billy Sailor, 19, agreed.

"If they think it will help, they should go ahead and try it out a couple places," he said. "Try it here and there and see what happens. Bring in people who can relate better to the kids."

The reaction at Broad Ripple, however, was relief.

Sophomore Elijah Toles was concerned about the school's art programs in the event of a takeover.

"That's the whole reason I came here," said Toles, who is interested in several different kinds of art.

If the school had been taken over, Toles said, "I was going to leave."

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