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NATIONAL NEWS

- 1) [States Continue Push to Toughen Teacher Policies](#); Heitin – Education Week
- 2) [Calculating the Savings From Ending Last-in, First-Out](#); Cavanagh – Education Week

FLORIDA NEWS

- 3) [Florida cheap on education spending](#); Weber – Orlando Sentinel
- 4) [Expanded Florida Virtual School options available for 2011-12](#); Palka – Florida Times-Union
- 5) [Polk County Commission Panel to Examine Ways to Increase Graduation Rate](#); Palmer – Lakeland Ledger

STATE NEWS

- 6) [Business-led school reform group launches in Conn.](#); Staff – Associated Press
- 7) [Ohio Picks Heffner as New State Schools Superintendent](#); Cavanagh – Education Week
- 8) [Arizona AIMS test scores are largely up statewide](#); Huicochia – Arizona Daily Star
- 9) [Ohio Gov. Kasich asks teachers to design merit-pay plan](#); Vardon – Columbus Dispatch

NATIONAL NEWS

States Continue Push to Toughen Teacher Policies

Education Week

By: Liana Heitin

July 12, 2011

[HTTP://WWW.EDWEEK.ORG/EW/ARTICLES/2011/07/13/36TEACHER.H30.HTML?TKN=MUXF44S7RM%2BIH04PPI57DS8RGUYGEWUAEPJJ&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK](http://WWW.EDWEEK.ORG/EW/ARTICLES/2011/07/13/36TEACHER.H30.HTML?TKN=MUXF44S7RM%2BIH04PPI57DS8RGUYGEWUAEPJJ&CMP=CLP-EDWEEK)

Changes afoot for evaluation, tenure, and collective bargaining

As the majority of legislative sessions around the country come to a close, many states will finish the season having pushed through policy changes that are likely to have a notable impact on teachers.

Building on the momentum from the previous two years, in which lawmakers began aggressively pursuing teacher-related reforms, about a dozen states passed laws since January that curb or otherwise modify teacher tenure, teacher evaluations, last-in-first-out policies, and collective bargaining. And several more states are on the verge of passing similar laws as they wrap up their legislative sessions.

Jennifer Dounay Zinth, a senior policy analyst at the Denver-based [Education Commission of the States](#), which has been tracking the legislation closely, said the protracted interest in revamping the teaching profession amounts to a “sea change.” “It’s hard to get your arms around—not just the number of bills being enacted but the breadth and depth of changes being made,” she said. “If somebody had asked me in 2010 if I thought states would be doing away with teacher tenure or the Wisconsin union battle [would have happened], I wouldn’t have listed either as something I expected down the pipeline” in 2011. During this session, Florida, Nevada, Ohio, and Utah ended the practice of automatically laying off the newest teachers when reductions in force are necessary (so-called last-in-first-out policies). And Ms. Zinth noted that there have been 11 policy changes so far this year that affect union operations, including new restrictions on collective bargaining in seven states. Idaho made some of the most sweeping changes to teacher-related policies, limiting collective bargaining to compensation and benefits, phasing out tenure, tying teacher evaluations to student-achievement data, and ending the last-in-first-out policy. Sandi Jacobs, the vice president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, a Washington-based research and advocacy group, said the fact that the policy changes were enacted wasn’t “particularly surprising” because Idaho’s education commissioner, Tom Luna, had made his intention to tackle teacher issues clear for some time. “But I think the sheer volume is a surprise,” she added.

Snowball Effect

Legislators began eying teacher quality for a variety of reasons. Many experts agree that a primary motivator was [“The Widget Effect.”](#) a 2009 report by the New York City-based New Teacher Project, which trains teachers, that highlighted schools’ failure to distinguish between effective and ineffective teachers.

There have also been “consistent indicators showing that student-achievement levels put our global competitiveness at risk,” Ms.

Jacobs pointed out. Results from the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, indicated that the United States scored statistically lower than 17 other member nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in math.

In addition, December 2009 marked the beginning of the Race to the Top competition, which offered states points for incorporating student-achievement data into teacher evaluations.

According to Michelle Exstrom, an education program principal at the National Conference of State Legislatures, Race to the Top “certainly put the carrot out there” for legislators to make systemic changes to the teaching profession.

But now, despite the fact that the first round of Race to the Top money is no longer on the table, this second wave of states has kept up—or even bolstered—the teaching reform agenda.

According to Ms. Jacobs, teacher quality was an issue a lot of states had been afraid take on, so “once the ball was rolling in some states, it continued rolling.” The first group of states to pass legislation “opened the door to show other states that this is not an immovable subject,” she said.

On the other hand, Ed Muir, the deputy director of the research and information-services department at the American Federation of Teachers, contended that, for the most part, the new legislation has been driven by budget cuts. The vast majority of states are facing continued budget shortfalls in the coming fiscal year.

“They’re trying to dress up disinvestment in the guise of shining reform,” Mr. Muir said.

He criticized recent legislation that gives teachers “less input and voice into how their work is structured and less [job] security” as “very wrong-headed.”

Collaboration, Contention

Recent lawmaking was most publicly divisive in Wisconsin, where Gov. Scott Walker, a Republican, signed legislation stripping teachers and many other public workers of their collective bargaining rights, sparking massive protests across the state.

But Ms. Exstrom of the NCSL maintains that states like Wisconsin that began their reform efforts with a stab at collective bargaining may have a harder time passing teacher-related policies down the road.

“In some states, there’s enough political will on one side to make those changes and get legislation through,” she said, “but in other states where cooperation is needed from the unions, it’s not going to happen.”

Mr. Muir agreed. “If you want to have collaboration and cooperation, the way to do it is to sit at the bargaining table,” he said. “If you’re taking away people’s rights, you can’t then go back and say, ‘We didn’t get cooperation.’ That’s dishonest and ridiculous.”

In Illinois, lawmakers took a less contentious approach, engaging in closed-door negotiations with advocacy groups and the unions. The resulting bill ultimately passed both chambers with ease.

Mr. Muir called that a “better” course of action than what occurred in most states. “We had to make some sacrifices, but overall the process was much more collaborative,” he said.

The Illinois law differs from other recent legislation in several ways. It puts more specific limitations on collective bargaining, including—in a section that pertains only to Chicago—requiring at least 75 percent of the union’s members to agree to a work stoppage for it to occur. And while most states’ new laws toughen tenure statutes, the Illinois law actually accelerates the tenure process for teachers who receive the highest marks. The Illinois legislation also makes it easier to dismiss ineffective tenured teachers.

Jonah Edelman, the chief executive officer of Stand for Children, a Portland-based advocacy organization that supported the Illinois legislation, said that is a substantial change. “This is paradigmatically fundamental stuff in terms of who is teaching children in Illinois,” he said. “It’s a misunderstanding when people assume that because it was a collaborative process, that equates to diluted policy.”

Evaluation Trumps

Illinois was part of both the first and second waves of states to pass teaching reforms, having enacted a law in 2010 that incorporates student achievement into teacher evaluations. According to the NCTQ’s Ms. Jacobs, “The evaluation piece is the real linchpin in any performance-management system.” All other teacher-related reform, in areas such as tenure, licensure, professional development, and compensation, are dependent on being able to “consistently and clearly identify who’s effective and who’s not,” she said.

Eight states in this legislative session alone linked evaluations to student achievement, with most eventually requiring that 50 percent of an evaluation score be based on student data.

Ms. Exstrom of the NCSL said the 50 percent benchmark was a direct result of Race to the Top, but that other states still considering such changes are “not sure that makes sense. That’s just a percentage put out there by the [U.S.] Department of Ed., and everybody followed suit.”

While only a handful of state governments are still in session, the legislative momentum on these issues is ongoing. At press time, both Texas and Michigan were awaiting their governors’ signatures on teacher-related measures. Both states’ legislatures passed bills that would replace last-in-first-out policies with performance-based layoffs. A series of four bills in Michigan would give schools more flexibility in dismissing teachers and link student achievement to evaluations. Michigan state Sen. Phil Pavlov, who chairs the education committee, said in an interview that his state looked to Florida and to Colorado, which passed the influential Senate Bill 191 last year, as models for their reform legislation.

Stakeholders agree that the weight of the new laws rides on forthcoming regulations. “These are very complex systems a lot of states are putting in place,” said Ms. Jacobs. While this second wave of states will benefit from looking to the systems of the early adopters, there is still “lots of training that has to accompany this and lots of new territory with questions that have to be answered,” she said.

“It’s a really heavy lift. If not done well, jobs are at stake, student success is at stake. Sustainability is tied to the quality of what gets implemented.”

Assistant Editor Sean Cavanagh contributed to this report.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Calculating the Savings From Ending Last-in, First-Out

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

July 12, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/07/end_last-in-first-out_save_jobs_authors_argue.html

Critics of "last-in, first-out" policies, which compel districts to lay off the least experienced educators first, say those arrangements undermine the talent pool by forcing school systems to make decisions about their workforce that have nothing to do with teaching ability.

But in a [newly published essay](#), a pair of scholars make the case that there's another consequence for "LIFO": When times are tough—as they are now—it forces districts to lay off more teachers than they otherwise might.

State and district leaders will probably read the paper with interest, as they scramble for ways to cut costs without undermining classroom instruction. This year, a number of states, including Florida, Idaho, [Illinois](#), and Ohio, took steps to in some way reduce the role of seniority protections in layoff decisions.

In an essay in the journal *Education Next*, authors Dan Goldhaber and Roddy Theobald examined layoff notices given to teachers in Washington state during two years: 2008-09, when 1,717 educators received notices, and 2009-10, when when 407 did, with 130 teachers receiving a layoff notice both years.*

Teachers who received layoff notices were much less likely to hold advanced degrees, and on average, they made about \$15,000 less than those told they would keep their jobs.

Had all the Washington state teachers targeted for layoff lost their jobs, it would have saved about \$5.5 million, Goldhaber and Theobald concluded.

But if teachers had been laid off at random, rather than based on seniority, districts around the state could given notices to nearly 400 fewer teachers—1,349 of them—and saved the same amount of money. (That assumes the unlucky ones made the average salary in their districts.)

While this is a simplified calculation across all districts, the authors also present a more conservative and realistic estimate meant to show the impact of protecting teachers based on seniority, rather than effectiveness, in individual school systems, Theobald explained in an e-mail.

"[D]istricts would only have to lay off 132 teachers under an effectiveness-based system in order to achieve the same budgetary savings they would achieve with 145 layoff notices under today's seniority-driven system, a difference of about 10 percent," the authors wrote.

A full version of the paper is under review at an economic journal, Theobald said. He and Goldhaber released very similar findings earlier this year, in a working paper. See my colleague Steve Sawchuk's [item](#) on that research, which concluded a very different group of teachers would have been targeted for layoffs, had they been judged on effectiveness, rather than seniority.

* An important note: As is often the case, many of the teachers who were set to be laid off were hired back, their jobs saved largely because of federal economic-stimulus money. Of the 1,717 who received a "reduction in force" notice in 2008-09, 1,457 returned to the same district the following year, the authors found.

Despite the rehiring of those teachers, Goldhaber and Theobald say that the data about who districts initially targeted for layoffs are relevant, because of what it reveals about their seniority policies. I'd also note that with future rounds of layoffs, districts are less likely to have [emergency federal aid](#) to bail them out.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

FLORIDA NEWS

Expanded Florida Virtual School options available for 2011-12

Florida Times-Union

By: Mary Kelli Palka

July 12, 2011

<http://jacksonville.com/opinion/blog/479262/mary-kelli-palka/2011-07-12/expanded-florida-virtual-school-options-available>

Most Florida students can now enroll directly in Florida Virtual School Full Time, thanks to a change in state law.

Up until this year, students needed prior public school enrollment, but that's now only a requirement for students in second through fifth grade. Other students starting in kindergarten can enroll directly to the virtual school program. The public school program is free to Florida students.

And beginning in 2012-13, Florida Virtual School Full Time will offer diplomas to high school students.

For more information, visit [Florida Virtual School Full Time's](#) website.

Are your children taking virtual classes? Will you enroll your children in virtual classes now that the law has changed? Please send your name and phone number to mary.palka@jacksonville.com if you would be willing to be interviewed for a Times-Union story.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Florida cheap on education spending

Orlando Sentinel

By: Dave Weber

July, 12, 2011

http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2011/07/florida-cheap-on-education-spending.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29

It's not exactly a news flash that Florida doesn't spend as much educating its kids as most other states.

But here's an update on the figures, thanks to Seminole Superintendent Bill Vogel, who asked his finance director to dig them out.

Finance guru John Pavelchak went to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data on school funding released in May to find the numbers. I double-checked – and you can too – because Florida's rankings seem just so very low that you want to think they are wrong.

But here they are, based on data the government collected for the 2008-09 school year:

Florida ranks 41st among the 50 states in total funding per student – \$10,098.

Florida ranks 49th among the states in the amount that the state contributes to educate a child each year – \$3,449.

And – drum roll please – Florida ranks 50th when it comes to the amount of money spent on schools per \$1,000 of personal income – \$35.89.

Where is Alabama when we need it? Apparently digging deeper into its pockets for \$45.31 per \$1,000 and a 35th ranking.

And where does that leave Florida. Ranking 44th in high school graduation rates. How's that for a return on investment?

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Polk County Commission Panel to Examine Ways to Increase Graduation Rate

Lakeland Ledger

By: Tom Palmer

July 12, 2011

<http://www.theledger.com/article/20110712/NEWS/110719855/1338/sitemaps05?tc=ar>

BARTOW | County commissioners Tuesday endorsed a proposal by Commissioner Bob English to try to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and college and to erase what he called Polk's "educational attainment deficit."

It's unclear exactly how local officials plan to attack the problem and how much it will cost.

English said he hopes to have a clearer proposal to present by February's annual retreat.

Commission Chairman Ed Smith, a former educator who worked with gifted students, said Polk has trouble retaining and attracting educated people because opportunities for them aren't here.

"I thank you for bringing this to everyone's attention," he said, adding it's a problem about which many people were aware.

"The question is what to do about it," Smith said.

English acknowledged it will be difficult.

"Eliminating the infrastructure deficit was a lot easier than this," he said.

Six years ago, English persuaded his colleagues to enact the biggest tax increase in Polk County history to solve the county's infrastructure deficit by setting aside specific taxes to support expansion of roads, parks and libraries.

That came in response to a report by Polk Vision in 2004 that cited a \$600 million infrastructure gap. English said he's not sure how the education deficit will be solved.

To deal with the education deficit, English said, he plans to meet with academic and business leaders to get their thoughts.

English said business leaders will be consulted because the education gap is one of the biggest obstacles to economic development in Polk County.

"Do you need our permission to do that?" Commissioner Todd Dantzler asked.

English said he did not, but said he didn't want to proceed without official support for the effort from his colleagues.

Smith and English both put faith in the development of the University of South Florida Polytechnic campus, and said it will act as a catalyst to boost Polk County's attractiveness to an educated work force.

"USF Poly will be a breakthrough," Smith said.

Commissioner Sam Johnson, who also worked in education for many years, said that at some point, the plan will require financial commitment from local officials and a commitment to develop the facilities to support it.

He said the challenge is that many development projects in Polk County are stymied by public opposition from people who oppose change.

"Polk County will have to change," he said.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

STATE NEWS

Business-led school reform group launches in Conn.

Associated Press

By: Staff

July 12, 2011

<http://www.courant.com/news/local/statewire/hc-ap-ct-schoolreform-connjul12.0.2280436.story>

HARTFORD, Conn. Several corporate leaders are launching a nonprofit organization to push for education reforms in Connecticut, saying changes are critical to the state's business climate, economy and the quality of its workforce.

The group members, including some current and former corporate presidents, announced Tuesday at the state Capitol that their new Connecticut Council for Education Reform is picking up where the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement left off last year.

That government commission, appointed by then-Gov. M. Jodi Rell, made more than 65 recommendations that included better early childhood education for poor families and more training and accountability for educators.

The main focus has been to close the academic achievement gap between wealthy and poor students. Education studies have shown that Connecticut has the largest disparity among all states.

For example, only 60 percent of low-income students in Connecticut graduate from high school in four years, compared with 86 percent of their peers from middle-class or upper-income homes.

And the gaps are evident many years before high school: Third-grade students from low-income homes in Connecticut tend to score significantly lower than their peers in standardized tests, particularly in reading.

"This is not acceptable for the students, this is not acceptable for parents or for the state's business and economic well-being. A vibrant local economy requires a vibrant and highly skilled workforce to succeed," said Peyton Patterson, the new group's chairwoman and the former president, CEO and chairwoman of NewAlliance Bank.

While businesses have a vested interest in pushing for an educated workforce, business leaders are also used to being held accountable for results that can be measured and duplicated, Patterson said, adding they will use those skills to work with state and local education leaders to turn ideas into reality.

"There has not been a channel for businesses to participate in such an important effort," she said.

The prior government-appointed commission, whose recommendations are the guide posts for the new group, included several members who've branched off to start the nonprofit organization.

Some specific recommendations include pushing for more pre-kindergarten programs for low-income children whose parents cannot afford those services, and encouraging better evaluations and training for teachers at all levels.

John Rathgeber, president and CEO of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, said Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's

administration has supported the need for more pre-kindergarten education, and that they all share the belief that closing the achievement gap starts before children reach elementary school.

"It clearly became evident everywhere we went that having kids ready to learn when they entered kindergarten was essential if they were going to be able to meet the standards of reading and math," Rathgeber said of their work on the previous commission.

Like several other Connecticut initiatives, though, some education reforms and improvements have been delayed this year because of budget constraints -- and administration leaders have warned there appears to be no bonanza of cash ahead in coming years, either.

Some members of the new corporate-led education reform group said Tuesday they recognized those constraints but think that good planning could put Connecticut in a position to win money in the next round of federal Race to the Top grants. Connecticut's application was rejected last year.

And, as in the corporate world, what's already being spent should be scrutinized and reallocated to produce the best results, they said.

"We need to step back and take a look at what's working and what's not working," said Ramani Ayer, the recently retired chairman and CEO of The Hartford Financial Services Group and a member of the new nonprofit council.

"I don't think we have done that self-audit of the whole issue," he said. "I believe this is one area where, if you were to properly examine how the funds are being deployed, we will discover there is existing available resources we could start to channel in the direction of enhancing student performance."

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Ohio Picks Heffner as New State Schools Superintendent

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

July 12, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/07/ohio_picks_new_state_schools_superintendent.html

Ohio's state board of education, in an unexpected move, selected the state's interim superintendent of public instruction, Stan W. Heffner, to fill the job on a permanent basis.

He replaces Deborah Delisle, who resigned earlier this year under what she said was [pressure](#) from the office of Republican Gov. John Kasich.

Heffner was not initially thought to be a contender for the job. But this week, the state board decided to interview him, after taking a favorable view of his work as the fill-in for the top post, according to the state department of education.

Ohio officials received 40 letters of interest in the position and interviewed eight candidates. A [top adviser](#) to Kasich, Robert Sommers, took himself out of the running recently, citing worries that state ethics laws would [interfere](#) with his ability to do the job. After another candidate, Steve Dackin, dropped out, [reportedly](#) the only remaining candidate was Robert Schiller, the [former state schools superintendent](#) in Illinois.

"Stan Heffner has done a terrific job as interim superintendent, and we are delighted he will continue to provide us with strong leadership," state board President Debe Terhar said in a statement.

Heffner will lead a system that serves 1.8 million students. Ohio was a [\\$400 million winner](#) in the federal Race to the Top competition last year, and the state is taking on the [tricky task](#) of making good on the promises in its plan, an effort that could present Heffner with a lot of tough decisions.

Kasich has angered many teachers through his support for a controversial measure to cut their collective bargaining rights, which could create another challenge for Heffner. Many local school officials have also objected to the governor's budget, which reduces funding for schools. Kasich has argued that the changes to collective bargaining will save districts, and taxpayers, money over time.

Heffner was heavily involved in efforts to improve the state's curriculum and instruction, department officials say, and he has also played a role in Ohio's work, along with many other states, in implementing common standards.

He [began his career](#) as a teacher in South Dakota, and he later became the state's youngest high school principal. He also served as South Dakota's deputy secretary of education and cultural affairs. According to his bio, Heffner had planned to join the Educational Testing Service upon completing his work as interim superintendent, to work as a senior executive with the organization's new K-12 multistate assessment programs group.

Now, his career is going in a different direction.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Arizona AIMS test scores are largely up statewide

Arizona Daily Star

By: Alexis Huicochea

July 13, 2011

http://azstarnet.com/news/local/education/article_bee710f0-8ec7-5ad0-926c-65b74a04842c.html

Most Tucson districts also see gain; results dip across AZ on writing part

Across the state, students fared better on the AIMS test this year than last year in all subjects except writing.

Scores released by the Arizona Department of Education this week show the same holds true for most of the nine Tucson-area school districts: Amphitheater, Catalina Foothills, Flowing Wells, Marana, Sahuarita, Sunnyside, Tanque Verde, TUSD and Vail.

The state-mandated high-stakes test measures a student's knowledge in reading, writing and math at the 10th-grade level.

While students struggled with the adoption of new, rigorous math standards last year, writing proved to be the most challenging this year.

In 2010, 71 percent of students statewide passed the writing portion of AIMS. This year, that number dipped to 56 percent. In Pima County, 54 percent of students passed.

The drop was expected because the test changed this year to reflect higher standards of what students should know about writing, said Andrew LeFevre, public-relations director at the Department of Education.

"The end result is that holding students to a higher standard in their writing throughout their academic careers will lead to greater success when they enter the workforce," concluded state schools chief John Huppenthal.

Though gains were seen on the math portion, they were slight, with 59 percent of students passing across the state, compared with 57 in 2010. In Pima County, 55 percent of students passed - an increase of 1 percentage point.

In the area of reading, all nine of the local school districts saw a boost in the percentage of students who passed.

This year's AIMS test held considerably more weight for high school seniors - the first class that had the test determine 95 percent of their eligibility for a diploma.

There were nearly 200 seniors in the Tucson area who did not graduate despite having completed their required course work and having passing grades.

Reporter Becky Pallack contributed to this report.

[\(Back to top\)](#)

Ohio Gov. Kasich asks teachers to design merit-pay plan

Columbus Dispatch

By: Joe Vardon

July 13, 2011

http://www.dispatch.com/live/content/local_news/stories/2011/07/13/teachers-to-design-merit-pay-plan.html?sid=101

ASHLAND, Ohio - It took a 30-minute meeting with a handful of teachers from across the state yesterday for Gov. John Kasich to decide who should construct a merit-pay system for Ohio schools.

And it's not him.

"I've become convinced that when it comes to actually designing this program, the governor ought to stay out of it," Kasich said after the meeting at Ashland University. "I'd be the most comfortable if the teachers themselves could put together what they think is a fair process."

Kasich concluded a whirlwind tour of northeastern Ohio yesterday with a sit-down with seven teachers and a librarian who responded to the Republican governor's request for input in implementing a merit-pay system for teachers.

In April, Kasich asked the state's 115,000 public-school teachers to email his office with ideas for creating a merit-pay system. He received more than 1,200 responses, and his administration quietly constructed a steering committee of more than a dozen teachers from across Ohio to help gather information.

Additionally, the administration has held seven regional meetings with groups of teachers who responded to Kasich's request. Heavily involved in the process are Sarah Dove, a Gahanna teacher on loan to the Department of Education, and Robert Sommers, Kasich's education adviser.

The recently enacted two-year state budget calls for every school district to adopt a new teacher-evaluation system by the start of the 2013-14 school year. It must conform to a framework that the state Department of Education is to develop this year.

That framework will require that 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation be tied to student-academic performance, a provision that follows a key element of the federal Race to the Top program. More than half of Ohio districts are participating in that program, sharing in about \$400 million in funding.

Sommers said the administration hopes to produce an outline for instituting merit pay in October or November based on these sessions with teachers, and that information will coincide with the experiences from schools participating in Race to the Top in constructing a statewide merit-pay system.

"We want to do it but we don't want this to be some sort of a 'gotcha' policy," Kasich said. "We want this to be a process where, frankly, teachers can be helped."

Kasich said some of the ideas floated during yesterday's session included rewarding teachers for making an effort to reach parents whose children are struggling in class, and having so-called peer evaluations conducted by teachers from different schools who could remain objective.

Heather Woodyard, a teacher in Cincinnati Public Schools who attended yesterday's meeting, said many in her district do not fear switching to a merit-pay system, because teacher evaluations have taken place in her district for years.

"But you have to allow districts to tailor (merit pay) to the specific settings in their communities," Woodyard said.

Kasich kicked off his day at Mount Sinai Baptist Church, located in the poorest section of Cleveland, to tout the criminal-sentencing-reform law he signed last month.

The governor then traveled to the city of Green, near Akron, to discuss the shared-service provisions for local governments in the budget.

[\(Back to top\)](#)