

From: Sarah Powell (Sarah@Excelined.org) <sarah@excelined.org>

To: Undisclosed recipients:

CC:

Date: Thu, 9/1/2011 11:04:33 AM

Subject: Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 9/1/11

Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 9/1/11

For more education news, visit *The Ed Fly* at www.TheEdFly.com.

NATIONAL NEWS

- 1) [Chiefs for Change Worried About Race to Top Delays](#); McNeil – Education Week
- 2) [Assistive Technology Broadens Its Range](#); O'Connor – Education Week

FLORIDA NEWS

- 3) [Gov. Scott wants Florida to apply for Race to Top](#); Staff – The Associated Press
- 4) [Florida: Keys charter schools grow in popularity](#); Kinney – Keynoter

STATE NEWS

- 5) [At his charter school, ex-United Teachers Los Angeles head would target tenure](#); Blume – Los Angeles Times
- 6) [Virginia: Fairfax schools to offer honors courses online](#); Brown – Washington Post
- 7) [Pilot evaluation system will judge New Jersey teachers partially on students' performance](#); Oliver – New Jersey Star-Ledger
- 8) [Ohio: Impoverished students making some strides](#); Boss – Columbus Dispatch
- 9) [Wisconsin: Some students may be turned away from Racine voucher program](#); Richards – Milwaukee Wisconsin Journal Sentinel

NATIONAL NEWS

Chiefs for Change Worried About Race to Top Delays

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

August 31, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/08/chiefs_for_change_worried_abou.html

The state education commissioners in the [Chiefs for Change](#) group are urging U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to stick to his guns as states implement their Race to the Top promises—and as many of those states push back their timelines.

In an Aug. 25 [letter](#) to Duncan, the chiefs, who advocate for "visionary education reform," wrote:

"We understand implementation plans and scopes of work may require adjustments, such as with the timelines; however, in the spirit of the Race to the Top competition, Race to the Top winners must be held accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students and for fully implementing their Race to the Top proposals."

What this group of 10 chiefs is referring to is the number of changes the Education Department has [allowed](#) states to make as they implement their Race to the Top plans. States have [scaled back their plans](#) in some cases and delayed projects.

The letter followed a call Rhode Island commissioner Deb Gist and other chiefs had with Duncan to voice concerns that the goals of Race to the Top might be watered down during implementation, according to spokeswoman for the chiefs.

But even some of the Chiefs for Change states have submitted amendments to their Race to the Top plans and shifted timelines.

One [amendment](#) from Rhode Island delays the awarding of grants to expand high-performing charter schools by at least a year. And, that amendment also allows Rhode Island to slightly delay implementing its new educator certification system. For the first time that I've seen, the department is threatening enforcement action—the withholding of \$18 million in Race to the Top funds—against Rhode Island if the state doesn't "substantially comply" with its timeline for finishing a new teacher certification system.

Florida and Tennessee, each led by a chief for change, have more minor amendments on file.

However, other states have hit far bigger hurdles. New York saw its new teacher-evaluation system [struck down](#) by a state court, and a contract to create a new data system got caught up in the Rupert Murdoch/News Corp. hacking scandal and [has been shelved](#). Both are key parts of the state's Race to the Top plan.

Hawaii has also [encountered problems](#) implementing its teacher-evaluation system.

This is hard work, especially since states pulled out all the stops to win the money and now must deliver on their promises. And in some states, leadership has changed and the folks who are left to implement the plan aren't the ones who wrote it. So it makes sense that the department gives states some wiggle room as they bring their Race to the Top plans to life. But many folks are worried about whether some states ([New York and Hawaii](#) have been named) will be able to live up to their end of the bargain.

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

Assistive Technology Broadens Its Range

Education Week

By: Mary Catherine O'Connor

August 22, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-assistivetech.h31.html?](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-assistivetech.h31.html?tkn=SQWFNTVCETuGYmis8hWfbALe%2B4RluY2%2BJJk&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH)

[tkn=SQWFNTVCETuGYmis8hWfbALe%2B4RluY2%2BJJk&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/24/01edtech-assistivetech.h31.html?tkn=SQWFNTVCETuGYmis8hWfbALe%2B4RluY2%2BJJk&cmp=clp-edweek&intc=EW-EL0811-EWH)

If you've ever felt the vibration of a cellphone, or used Google's voice-based search function to look up a recipe instead of touching your keyboard with wet fingers, you've enjoyed the benefits of assistive technology.

Assistive technologies have become commonplace in consumer electronics—in fact, they make up a \$30.5 billion industry that's expected to grow fast, as baby boomers' vision and hearing begin to fail. But those bells and whistles are byproducts of the efforts made by educational technology developers to design and refine assistive technology tools that remove barriers to learning for children suffering from a range of disabilities.

Thanks to the spread of the principles of universal design for learning, in which the needs of all users—with all levels of access and ability—are considered when creating products, many assistive technology tools are suited to address both cognitive disabilities and physical limitations and are increasingly being employed to help students with disabilities use digital curricula and take virtual courses. That is why experts suggest looking for ways that a single software platform might accommodate the learning differences of a number of students with disabilities—but without losing sight of each individual's needs, and without assuming that two students with the same diagnosis will benefit equally from a single technology or tool.

"It's less about the label or disability that each student carries, and more about how his or her challenges manifest themselves," said Dan Leibowitz, a learning specialist at the 400-student Town School for Boys, a private K-8 school in San Francisco. He is the owner of Innovative Learning Services, which works with individuals and small groups of students and parents to connect them with technologies and skills to improve the students' ability to learn.

"With each [assistive technology] tool, I ask: 'Does it help students access information? And does it help students demonstrate their knowledge?'" he said.

While universal design is making assistive technologies useful to an ever-wider cross section of students with learning disabilities, individuals' needs are paramount. "The mainstreaming movement means regular teachers are learning more about assistive technologies and applying the same technologies for their whole classrooms," said Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, a former deputy director of the National Center for Technology Innovation, or NCTI, in Washington. Ms. Silver-Pacuilla is now the supervisory education specialist for the U.S. Office of Adult and Vocational Education.

"So the pressure is on educational tech developers to build in access avenues for [assistive technology] into their products, and the pressure is on AT developers to make their products more applicable to mainstream students."

But the disability community worries that trend could mean students with multiple or severe disabilities won't get the tools they really need.

For example, while a text-to-speech application can give a blind student access to a specific document on a computer, it won't allow him or her to navigate outside that document and access other programs or applications, said Jennifer McDonald-Peltier, an assistive technology specialist for the Center for Accessible Technology, a Berkeley, Calif.-based nonprofit that aims to equip students with disabilities with the technology they need to be successful. For that, a screen reader program is essential, she pointed out.

Acquiring assistive technology tools is a multistep process that involves testing, and further study and coordination with a district assistive technology specialist. Many technology providers offer trial tests of their products, and educators can test-drive the various assistive technologies on display at education conferences.

'Cheap and Easy Tools'

And no matter what a district's budget situation is or the number or types of disabilities students have, experts in assistive technology offer some universal advice.

To begin with, schools should not overlook the technologies already available.

“My first impulse when an educator says she wants to differentiate her curriculum, and differentiate her instruction for a variety of students,” said Ms. McDonald-Peltier, “is to start by looking at [Microsoft] Word and PowerPoint. These cheap and easy tools might already meet your needs.”

In addition, school computers are likely to have some basic assistive technology tools built in at the platform level. Macintosh operating systems, for example, offer Universal Access, a set of accessibility-focused monitor and keyboard settings designed to help users who have visual and auditory limitations, or those with motor-skill problems. At the other end of the spectrum are the comprehensive software platforms, such as Inspiration software, or the WYNN literacy software, which supports a long list of features and add-ons, such as support for optical-character-recognition devices, or talking dictionaries. Experts point out that such products can be very good learning tools—but they can become very expensive. They say educators might only need specific modules within a software suite, or perhaps another software product, with fewer features.

In any case, experts recommend looking for something that’s easy to install and learn—for teachers and students alike. “The training component is often overlooked in purchasing decisions,” said Ms. McDonald-Peltier.

Upgradable products are preferable, too, given the rapidity with which technology is evolving.

‘We Need Proof

Finally, experts suggest relying on the research that educational technology groups, such as the NCTI and the Washington-based Center for Implementing Technology in Education, which helps schools implement assistive technology, have compiled. The Tech Matrix is an online tool that allows educators to search for assistive technology tools by specific content areas.

The NCTI is also working with the Assistive Technology Industry Association to help assistive technology manufacturers and software developers conduct research on the efficacy of their tools for learning.

“You wouldn’t test the efficacy of eyeglasses, but other tools, such as digital-text software that includes educational prompts” need to be tested, said Ms. Silver-Pacuilla. “Does it really help students with learning issues? We need proof.”

Most students, through time and experimentation, will find the tools that work best for them, experts suggest.

Brandi Allan, a junior at Immaculate Conception Academy, a 280-student high school in San Francisco, was diagnosed with dyslexia in the 1st grade. She uses a combination of an AlphaSmart keyboard, an Intel optical-character-recognition device for text-to-speech help with printed matter, and a LiveScribe note-taking pen.

“You have to find your own tweaks” to find the best way to use different tools effectively, Ms. Allan said. “I’m still experimenting with different technologies, and I have been since around third grade.”

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

FLORIDA NEWS

Gov. Scott wants Florida to Apply for Race to Top

Associated Press

By: Staff

September 1, 2011

<http://floridacapitalnews.com/article/20110901/CAPITOLNEWS/109010314>

MIAMI — Florida Gov. Rick Scott wants the state to compete in the next round of the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top competition, which could award up to \$100 million to improve early learning.

To apply for the grant, however, state legislators must approve a budget amendment accepting \$3.4 million in federal funding for a home visiting program for at-risk families. The Florida Department of Health requested the grant in the last legislative session, but it was not funded.

Ben Wolf, legislative analyst at the Florida House of Representatives, said at the time there wasn't knowledge it was tied to Race to the Top. The issue will go before the legislative budget commission on Sept. 7.

The competition is the third round of the Department of Education's Race to the Top initiative, which has spurred education reform around the United States. Florida was awarded \$700 million in the second round of the competition, funds that are now going toward creating new teacher evaluation systems, improving the lowest performing schools and other reforms that are designed to boost student achievement and close the achievement gap.

The new round of the competition will award \$500 million to states that have been leaders in early education, those programs that are designed to help prepare the youngest children for school. Studies have shown that children from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently enter kindergarten and first-grade already behind their more affluent peers. Proponents say early education program can improve long-term performance.

The early learning grant is aimed at expanding access to low-income children and creating high quality services and assessments. In Florida, those funds would go toward improving the quality of school readiness programs, as well as the state's voluntary pre-kindergarten and Head Start programs, said Amy Graham, a spokeswoman for Scott.

The Republican governor has rejected some federal funding in the past, including more than \$2 billion to construct a high speed rail from Tampa to Orlando. His office has said he is opposed to federal funds that create a recurring expense the state would eventually have to pay for.

"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," Graham said in an email.

Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment in 2002 requiring the state to offer voluntary, free pre-kindergarten for every 4-year-old. In its annual report, the National Institute for Early Education Research ranked Florida second overall in terms of access, but 37th in all reported spending. The base student allocation was \$2,562 for the school-year program in 2010-11.

"The challenge for Florida is the program standards and funding are so low," said Steven Barnett, NIEER's executive director.

Barnett said the state needs to work on ensuring it has highly qualified teachers in the classroom and improving student screenings and assessments. Currently, teachers in the summer programs are required to have at least a bachelor's degree; those in the year-round program are required to complete a 600-hour child development associate credential.

Data from the Florida Department of Education indicated that in 2008-09, 93 percent of students who completed the pre-kindergarten program scored as ready for kindergarten in an entry screening exam. Eighty-three percent of those who had not participated in the program were similarly prepared.

The state does not require a similar screening for when children enter pre-kindergarten, making it difficult to assess how much students improve in the program. Barnett said the state should require that.

"The whole system that Florida has been using of testing kids at kindergarten entry and then using that to make inferences about whether the program has performed has been wrongheaded," he said.

Cynthia Lorenzo, director of the Agency for Workforce Innovation, one of the agencies which implements Florida's voluntary pre-kindergarten program, said the Race to the Top money could pay for supplemental instructor training and potentially for testing students before they begin the pre-K program.

"This is definitely an infusion of funds that is very much needed," Lorenzo said.

The application for the Race to the Top competition is due Oct. 19.

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

Florida: Keys charter schools grow in popularity

Keynoter

By: Sean Kinney

August 31, 2011

<http://www.keysnet.com/2011/08/31/373444/keys-charter-schools-grow-in-popularity.html>

This year saw the opening of two new charter schools in the Florida Keys and the expansion of two others. That means of the 8,243 students served by the Monroe County School District, nearly 12 percent of them, 983 students, attend one of the six charter schools.

New this year is the Key West Collegiate School, operating on the campus of Florida Keys Community College; and in Tavernier, the Ocean Studies Charter School.

At the Big Pine Academy, students can for the first time progress into the seventh grade, and Executive Director Cathy Hoffman said plans are to add eighth grade in the next school year.

It's the same story at the Montessori Elementary School of Key West. Classes expanded to include sixth grade for this school year and Principal Lynn Barras said to look for the addition of kindergarten and seventh and eighth grades in coming years.

The shift in enrollment from traditional schools and propagation of charter schools is not unique to the Keys; school districts statewide have received nearly 40 percent more charter applications this year than the previous year, topping more than 340 requests.

Superintendent Jesus Jara said that when he came to work for the Keys schools system as chief operating officer in January 2010, he immediately noticed the unusually high number of charters.

"For me," Jara said, "giving parents the choice and the opportunity, that's fine. They are public schools and they're doing well.

My concern, as we've seen a decrease in an enrollment in our schools, is a minor allocation switch."

Charter schools are funded by the state with the same per-student allocation of money that goes to traditional public schools; the money is dispersed by the local school district, the coffers of which retain a 5 percent administration fee that pays for things like training and computer software.

So charter schools in the Keys received \$6,272,031.63 from the district, which kept their 5 percent, totaling \$313,601.58.

Jara identified another concern that goes along with an increase in charter schools: Demographics.

Districtwide, including charter schools, Asian, black and Hispanic students make up 43.8 percent of the student population; that's 3,607 students.

At just the charters, minus Ocean Studies, which couldn't provide the data, 22 percent are Asian, black and Hispanic; that's 208 students out of 943 total.

At the Montessori Elementary School of Key West, of the 104 students, only 13 (12.5 percent) identify themselves as Asian, black or Hispanic.

Just a few blocks down United Street at Glynn Archer Elementary, a traditional public school, 250 of the 350 students are Asian, black or Hispanic; that comes out to 71.4 percent.

Up the Keys at Treasure Village Montessori, 33 of the 206, 16 percent, are Asian, black or Hispanic; compare that to 45 percent, or 408 out of 906, at Key Largo School. Both schools serve students from kindergarten to grade eight.

"I'd like to start looking at the demographics and start making sure they are the demographics of all the schools," Jara said.

Another issue: School Board Chairman John Dick said a reduction in traditionally enrolled students should prompt a corresponding reduction in administrators and central office staff.

"We don't provide most services to these [charter] schools," he said. "They do their own budgeting, their own payroll, they handle a lot of that stuff. Why would we need to maintain the same central office staff if we have all the students we were providing service to going to charters?"

Dick and Jara say there's a need to continue to improve Keys schools, and communicate those improvements to parents. "We have great schools," Dick said, "we just need to make them better."

Jara agreed: "We must be [doing] something that we're not communicating the great news, we're not marketing our schools, or we have to be in a situation where we do a better job meeting the needs of our customers and meeting the needs of all our students."

The Florida Keys' charter schools

Of the 17 public schools comprising the Monroe County School District, six are public charters; these schools receive state funding but are given wide latitude to operate in a more non-traditional manner than a typical public school. Following are the specifics for the six for the 2011-12 school year, which began on Aug. 22.

Montessori Elementary School of Key West; grades one through six; 104 students.

Sigsbee Charter School, Key West; prekindergarten through sixth; 405 students.

Key West Collegiate School; grades nine through 12; 42 students.

Big Pine Academy; prekindergarten through grade seven; 186 students.

Treasure Village Montessori School, Islamorada; prekindergarten through grade eight; 206 students.

Ocean Studies Charter School, Tavernier; kindergarten through grade three; 40 students

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

STATE NEWS

At his charter school, ex-United Teachers Los Angeles head would target tenure

Los Angeles Times

By: Howard Blume

September 1, 2011

A.J. Duffy, who headed a teachers union that has long fought against charter schools, now is starting his own. And some of his ideas are going to trouble some educators and his friends in the labor movement.

The longtime anti-charter crusader wants to make it harder for teachers to earn tenure protections and wants to lengthen that process. He even wants to require teachers to demonstrate that they remain effective in the classroom if they want to keep their tenure protections.

And if a tenured teacher becomes ineffective, he wants to streamline dismissals. The process now in place can stretch out for several years, even with substantial evidence of gross misconduct. Some union leaders, notably Duffy, have defended this "due process" as a necessary protection against administrative abuses.

"I would make it 10 days if I could," Duffy now says of the length of the dismissal process.

These are not viewpoints ever advanced, condoned or accepted by United Teachers Los Angeles, which represents teachers and other professionals in the nation's second-largest school system. Duffy headed that union for six years, until term limits forced him from office in July.

Duffy will have a unionized school, preferably with his former union, but not at the expense of sacrificing his vision for how a school should operate, he said.

Skeptics, who criticized Duffy's management of the union, now question his qualifications to run schools. Charter school advocates responded cautiously, but were generally positive.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa had called the union under Duffy "one unwavering roadblock to reform." The mayor had no comment, but Patrick Sinclair, a spokesman for a group of schools overseen by the mayor, said, "We're glad he's pursuing a lot of the changes and reforms that we and the mayor would like to see."

Charter schools are free public schools that are operated independently from the local school district. They are not subject to some rules that govern traditional schools, and most are non-union.

Duffy, 67, will move this week from a founding board member to executive director of Apple Academy Charter Public Schools. He plans to submit a charter proposal for review and possible approval by the L.A. Unified School District in the next few weeks. He hopes to open one or more schools in the South L.A. area by the fall of 2012 at the latest.

Among those on his board: Former school board President Caprice Young, who went on to head the California Charter Schools Assn., after the teachers union mounted a successful campaign to oust her in 2003. Duffy was a union activist then; he became president in 2005, joining an anti-charter union leadership.

"If you were to put it in evangelical terms, this is about the best conversion I could hope for," said Young, who now heads a nonprofit teacher-recruiting effort. "I hesitate to describe it that way, because this is a collaboration. I've been willing to let go of my preconceived notions about someone with whom I've fought in the past."

The Apple Academy board also includes Ref Rodriguez, co-founder of the Partnerships to Uplift Communities, a large and non-union local charter group.

Even while Duffy battled charter schools, he also wanted to unionize them. Some other UTLA leaders opposed this goal; they didn't want to sanction the existence of charters in any way. L.A. Unified has more charters than any other school system, 197, and two joined UTLA over the last six years. (Some traditional schools converted to charters and remained with the union.)

As union president, Duffy railed against the lower percentage of special education students and students learning English who were served by charters — an issue that still troubles him. And he fought to keep charter schools off L.A. Unified campuses. Every time a charter school opened, it siphoned off union teaching positions.

At the same time, he argued for charter school-like freedoms at traditional schools, running up against the L.A. Unified bureaucracy and, frequently, his own union's reluctance to risk weakening contract protections.

As his term in office ended, Duffy had a right to return to the classroom — he had been a teacher and a dean. But he hoped for a larger role. That chance came through an unexpected vehicle: a charter-school cheating scandal.

In 2010, when teachers at Crescendo charter schools reported that they were ordered to cheat on state standardized tests, they quickly joined UTLA for protection against retaliation. Duffy took up their cause and argued that the schools should remain open.

L.A. Unified ultimately voted to close Crescendo in July. Now, Duffy hopes to hire Crescendo teachers and attract former students.

Duffy said his new role gives him another crack at a longtime union goal: freeing teachers from what he regards as an oppressive district bureaucracy.

And he said his teachers would receive a fair, if expedited, dismissal process. Struggling teachers would receive help before they were fired, and experienced teachers would have to support the dismissal.

Former UTLA President John Perez said he wished Duffy well but said he could not endorse Duffy's new direction. Charter school operators, he said, are laying the groundwork for using public-school funds at private schools through so-called vouchers.

They're also opening the door for corporations "who want to destroy public education by getting their hands on the hundreds of billions of dollars we spend on public education in this country," Perez said

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

Virginia: Fairfax schools to offer honors courses online

Washington Post

By: Emma Brown

August 31, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/fairfax-schools-to-offer-honors-courses-online/2011/08/31/gIQAbxFssJ_story.html

Fairfax County schools will offer several high school honors classes online this fall — a response, officials said, to parents' complaints about elimination of the face-to-face versions of the courses.

Tenth-grade World Studies II Honors and 11th-grade English Language and Composition Honors will be available via the school system's online campus, which offers a number of courses in a variety of subjects.

Schools may offer honors courses in classrooms if there is sufficient enrollment, Peter Noonan, assistant superintendent for instructional services, said Wednesday.

Honors courses are more rigorous than those at the standard level, but less demanding than Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses.

Fairfax officials decided several years ago to phase out honors courses in the 175,000-student system for subjects in which AP or IB classes were available. School officials maintained that removing the honors option would encourage more students — especially those from low-income and minority families — to challenge themselves.

A group of parent advocates brought the issue to the fore in recent months, asserting at school board meetings that an honors track is necessary for students who are bored in standard courses but would be overloaded taking multiple college-level classes.

"We listened very carefully to the community, and what the community wanted was a third option," Noonan said. "We provided that option and really believe it is a win-win for all the kids in Fairfax County."

The honors courses will use AP curriculum, but students will not be required to take the AP exam in May. Instead, instruction will continue until the end of the school year, giving students an additional month of class time to cover the same material.

Some parent activists criticized the new plan as insufficient, and school board member Patricia S. Reed (Providence) said she plans to push for reconsideration of the issue.

She said she thinks that the board, not administrators, should set the honors policy, with input from parents and teachers.

"To all of a sudden hear about it a week before school starts is no way to run an operation," she said. "I'm fearful that there will be a lot of confusion as people learn about this and try to make decisions about how to handle it."

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

Pilot evaluation system will judge New Jersey teachers partially on students' performance

New Jersey Star Ledger

By: Bobby Oliver

September 1, 2011

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/09/pilot_evaluation_system_will_j.html

The state has chosen ten school districts to help pilot a new evaluation system that will, for the first time, grade New Jersey teachers half on their students' performance in the classroom.

The state Department of Education expects to implement the system statewide by fall 2012. If Gov. Chris Christie succeeds in

pushing his education reform agenda before then — one that the state's largest teachers union staunchly opposes — teachers' performance under the new system could soon affect their tenure, pay and seniority rights.

"Precisely because teaching is an honored craft, we must recognize and respect effective educators, support teachers in their efforts to continue to develop their skills, and ensure that those comparatively few individuals who are unable to improve no longer remain in the classroom," acting Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf wrote of the pilot program in an op-ed published today.

Under the new system, districts will rate teachers half on student academic performance and half on classroom evaluations using a four-tiered scale, the worst grade being "ineffective," the best being "highly effective." Pilot districts are also expected to help develop evaluation criteria for untested grades and subjects.

The ten districts selected to participate among 31 applicants include: Alexandria Township, Bergenfield, Elizabeth, Monroe Township, Ocean City, Pemberton Township, Red Bank, Secaucus, West Deptford Township and Woodstown-Piles Grove Regional.

Each pilot district will receive a slice of \$1.1 million in state money to implement the program. Newark will also participate using separate, federal funding.

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

Ohio: Impoverished students making some strides

Columbus Dispatch

By: Charlie Boss

August 31, 2011

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2011/08/31/impoverished-students-making-some-strides.html>

The good news: More central Ohio schools with high numbers of poor children are proving that students can learn no matter the challenges they face.

The bad: Most schools with high numbers of impoverished students are still struggling to meet academic targets.

Fifty-one of 123 local schools deemed as "high poverty" under federal standards received D's or F's on this year's state report cards. Last year, 54 schools received those marks, which the state labels as "academic watch" and "academic emergency," respectively.

Thirteen of the low performers got a worse grade than a year ago. All but one of the 51 schools are in Columbus City Schools.

Experts say a number of factors explain why schools with large numbers of poor children continually struggle.

A change in principals, teacher turnover and high rates of student mobility all play a role, said James Moore III, an education professor at Ohio State University who has studied urban education.

Families often struggle to provide shelter and food, making it difficult for children to focus on what's happening in the classroom. Some students come from poorly educated families and often have gaps in their learning, he said.

"Poverty leaves debilitating effects on young people that affects their school outcomes."

Some schools, however, are making gains. Thirty-seven schools — 24 in the Columbus district — improved. Eleven buildings earned at least an A this year, triple the number from last year.

Two buildings, South-Western's Norton Middle School and Newark's Ben Franklin Elementary, earned their first-ever A's by bumping up their ratings two notches.

Students at each school learned more than a year's worth of material in 2010-11. All types of students showed enough progress on reading and math tests to meet a No Child Left Behind Act measure called "adequate yearly progress." And their performance-index scores — a calculation of results on all tests — improved.

"It doesn't matter whether students are poor, in the minority or whatever excuse we used to have on why kids don't learn," said Norton Principal Scott Cunningham. "We're proving that wrong."

At least two-thirds of the school's 500 students are low-income. About 17 percent of students have limited English proficiency. Norton, located in Prairie Township, draws students from the West Side of Columbus and has families from 20 countries.

Cunningham said the school has embraced a culture of high expectations and no excuses. Students are not allowed to receive zeros — those who haven't finished their homework or class assignments spend time at lunch or after school to complete them.

"Most kids fail because they don't do their work," Cunningham said. "We hold them accountable."

Teachers also collaborate weekly to discuss lessons, assessments and student progress. They frequently study their classes' performance on tests and provide additional help to those struggling.

On the five state tests given to middle-schoolers, Norton met the state's

75 percent proficiency standard on only one: eighth-grade reading. But students made a combined 34-percentage-point improvement on all the math, reading and science exams from last year. And they were above 70 percent proficiency on all tests but eighth-grade math.

In Whitehall, where three out of every four students are impoverished, the overall district rating remained a C, but gains were seen at the school level:

- Whitehall Yearling High School jumped to a B this year and met nine out of the 12 state standards, up from five. High schools are measured against their proficiency rates on 10 tests, plus attendance and graduation rates.

- After two years with a D, Beechwood Elementary moved to a C because rising test scores pushed its performance-index score up

1.4 points, to 81.2. And like the high school, Beechwood met the federal progress standard for the first time.

- Rosemore Middle School maintained its C but improved its performance on five of the seven indicators.

Kae Avenue Elementary, however, was the district's sole school that slid a rating, to a D this year. The school lost ground in four out of seven academic targets, including a more than

10 percentage-point drop in fourth-grade reading and math and fifth-grade math.

Superintendent Judyth Dobbert-Meloy said Kae Avenue is the district's most diverse school and that large numbers of students move in and out of the building during the school year. About 89 percent of students are low-income, and 30 percent have limited English proficiency.

"Educational research indicates that income level is a No. 1 factor in predicting academic success," Dobbert-Meloy said in an e-mail. "However, we believe that we can move the building forward this year."

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

Wisconsin: Some students may be turned away from Racine voucher programs

Milwaukee Wisconsin Journal Sentinel

By: Erin Richards

August 31, 2011

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/128854368.html>

The new private school voucher program in Racine has received more student applications than the 250-student first-year cap on enrollment will allow, meaning some interested pupils may be turned away this fall.

New figures from the state Department of Public Instruction show the number of applications received for the new Racine program includes 246 from low-income students and another 43 from students of higher economic means.

Low-income students who qualified for a free or reduced-price lunch last year have priority to enter the program, which for the first time will allow pupils from Racine to attend private schools with a taxpayer-funded voucher worth up to \$6,442.

New legislation signed by Gov. Scott Walker allowed for the creation of the Racine voucher program and expanded the 21-year-old Milwaukee voucher program.

The new law raises the income limits to allow middle-income students to qualify for vouchers, allows participating private schools to be located outside the Milwaukee city boundary and drops the 22,500-student cap on enrollment in Milwaukee.

The Racine program is limited to 250 students in the first year and 500 in the second year. There's no cap on Racine's enrollment after that.

For enrollment purposes, the applicant group of 246 students in Racine translates to the equivalent of 231.2 full-time students, and the group of 43 higher-income students translates to the equivalent of 41 full-time students.

Fractions enter the picture because some students attend school part time.

That brings the number of full-time equivalent applicants in Racine to 272.2.

Matt Kussow, executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools, said Wednesday the vast

majority of seats in the new Racine program will be filled with the group of low-income student applicants.

"It's likely that most of them will get in," Kussow said. "But some of the students in (the higher-income group) may not be able to get a voucher because of the cap."

Kussow said most of the students entering the Racine voucher program are likely coming from the Racine Unified School District, which could contribute to an enrollment drop in the state's fourth-largest school district.

DPI will soon finalize the number of low-income student participants, and then allot the leftover seats to children in the higher-income group.

Eight private schools in and around Racine have indicated they intend to accept students on vouchers this fall.

More schools join

Movement to take advantage of the new law has been less frenetic in Milwaukee's program.

According to the DPI, 107 schools have indicated they intend to participate in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, or voucher program, for the coming school year.

Of those, 11 are new to the program and nine are located outside Milwaukee, including St. Thomas More High School on the Milwaukee-St. Francis border, Hillel Academy in Fox Point, Torah Academy of Milwaukee in Glendale and Saint Martin of Tours Parish School in Franklin.

None of the schools outside Milwaukee would have been able to accept voucher students under the old rules.

Patrick Gasper, spokesman for the DPI, said his office wouldn't have preliminary application numbers for students intending to enter the Milwaukee program until later next week.

Some leaders of private schools that could be involved or expand their involvement in the Milwaukee voucher program appear to be watching the developments and using this year to plan.

Wisconsin Lutheran High School, at 330 N. Glenview Ave., already has 281 voucher students, 92 of whom are freshmen.

"We are already anticipating a huge increase in applications for next year," said Ned Goede, principal of the private Wisconsin Lutheran. "We're spending the whole semester with our faculty and board looking at what our school will look like in the next five years. The new ruling is forcing us to do that."

The new legislation also allows participating voucher schools to charge higher-income parents a fee for tuition on top of the \$6,442 voucher payment from the state.

For years, high school leaders in the voucher program have complained that a payment of approximately \$6,500 doesn't come close to covering the cost of educating secondary school students, and some leaders said it made more sense to reduce the number of voucher students they accept.

That could soon change. Goede said he expects voucher applications at Wisconsin Lutheran to double next year.

"Next year is an open field," he said. "It's going to be a huge year."

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