

From: [Clare Crowson \(Clare@floridapromise.org\)](mailto:Clare@floridapromise.org) <ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com>

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

NATIONAL NEWS

- 1) [Common-Core Tests to Have Built-in Accommodations](#); Shah – Education Week
- 2) [D.C. Charters not keen on walk in the PARCC](#); Turque – Washington Post
- 3) [Rules Set for Fresh Round of 'i3' Grants](#); McNeil – Education Week

FLORIDA NEWS

- 4) [The State of Teacher Evaluation in the State of Florida](#); Baeder – Education Week
- 5) [Scott signs voucher, baggy-pants bills](#); Larrabee – News Service of Florida
- 6) [Two high school students had one last chance to graduate. Did they make it?](#); Rodriguez – Orlando Sentinel

STATE NEWS

- 7) [6 Ind. school districts testing new evaluation systems linking student scores with teacher pay](#); Staff – Associated Press
- 8) [Opinion: Education has key role in economic revival](#); Editorial Board – Detroit News
- 9) [Wisconsin: Amid protests, panel votes to expand school choice, cut aid to local governments](#); Marley – Milwaukee Journal

NATIONAL NEWS

Common-Core Tests to Have Built-in Accommodations

Education Week

By: Nirvi Shah

June 3, 2011

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/06/03/33tests_ep.h30.html?tkn=YLUFH2vpp%2BvwZjj71VZTj1XRjz2pIEDW%2FtJY&cmp=

When Michael Hock was a special education teacher, he spent hours slicing quarter-inch slits in the center of index cards so that use them to isolate individual words and sentences while taking standardized tests.

When a new generation of tests—the common-core assessments—is unveiled in a few years, special education teachers should b their index cards and all the other shortcuts and homemade solutions they have created over the years to make paper-and-pencil t many students with disabilities.

That's because the new, computerized tests will have accommodations for most students with disabilities built right in.

Using \$360 million in federal Race to the Top money, two state collaboratives are designing tests for the new common standards in English/language arts that have been adopted by 44 states and the District of Columbia. The federal government expects the tests 2014-15 school year.

The two groups tasked with developing the common-core assessments have been thinking about students with disabilities from the won the grants from the U.S. Department of Education to design the tests. That's a sharp departure from what's been the norm in s testing, which has been to consider accommodations for students with disabilities as an afterthought.

"We're not even thinking about accommodations anymore" in the traditional sense, said Mr. Hock. He is now the director of educat for the Vermont Department of Education and co-chair of the accessibility and accommodations work group for the [SMARTER Bal; Consortium](#)—one of the two groups developing the new tests.

The other test consortium, the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers](#), or PARCC, will soon launch an a fairness technical working group, said Laura M. Slover, the senior vice president of Achieve and the project manager for the Washin nonprofit organization's work with the consortium.

Back-End Band-Aids

For years, most states have tried retrofitting exams designed to test students' knowledge in math, reading, science, and writing for special needs. But those back-end Band-Aids can create their own set of issues, not the least of which is coordinating testing so t need similar adaptations are grouped together and tested at the same time.

"It was a logistical nightmare," said Carol André, the special education director at Exeter High School in Exeter, N.H. "And you still issue with testing: You don't even know if the results you're getting are accurate."

When making current state tests work for all students, there is inconsistency from school to school, she said. In particular, when t proctors are allowed to read portions of a test aloud for students, the way that information is read can vary widely.

"We had to all but police our own people to be sure they were not giving the kids an unfair advantage or leg up. It was really hard, e younger kids. The adults desperately want them to do well," Ms. André said. "Suddenly, without even being conscious of it, you ma who's reading the question and the four answers but they're doing a little more emphasis on choice C, or the kid is reading the adu

On the new generation of computerized tests, it's likely that words that can be read aloud will be read in the same way, in the same state, Mr. Hock said.

"We're not trying to provide anyone with any kind of advantage—that's what we're trying to avoid," he added.

Glimpse Ahead

At Vergennes Union High School and Middle School in Vergennes, Vt., special education teacher Suzanne Buck remembers one created for a student with vision problems.

"The test was huge. It stuck out so badly. Everyone else could read it from four rows behind," Ms. Buck said.

Now, to test students in science, her school is using an exam designed in much the way the future common-core assessments cover a [version](#) of the science test for students in the New England Common Assessment Program, a collaboration of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, is computerized. Some of the test features for students with disabilities were designed by the Nimble Innovation Lab at MIT, a test-development company in Newton, Mass.

For students with special needs, portions of the test can be magnified right on the screen. Such features also can be turned on and off for students for whom they are allowed may access them.

The science test also offers individual students the ability to highlight or obscure words on the screen and play background music to help the students calm or focused, a feature intended for students with attention disorders.

Mr. Hock also envisions other features, such as the option of changing the color of the text or allowing students to change the contrast of the text while they are reading. These features could help students with visual impairments and some types of reading-based learning disabilities, he said.

"The idea of making tests accessible, it's a social-justice issue," Mr. Hock said. "And we want to accurately measure every kid's skills. Like the current tests, the adaptive features that students would be able to use on the new computerized tests would have to be specifically designed for individualized education programs, and before test day, they would get a chance to practice using those features.

For some students, the future tests may be translated into different languages. The SMARTER Balanced group has a federal grant worth \$1 million in addition to its basic test-development grant to translate its math test into American Sign Language, Spanish, and three other languages.

"The kids who use American Sign Language present unique challenges," Mr. Hock said. "It's not signed English. It's a language all its own."

Interpreter Avatars

But having an interpreter translate a test isn't always possible, or practical, for every student who needs one. One idea the Nimble Innovation Lab experimented with is a sign-language avatar that would appear on screen when a deaf student opts to use it, said Jennifer Higgins, manager at the lab.

And, as with readers, all signers aren't usually signing exactly alike, she said. But a computer-generated avatar would sign the same way for everyone.

"The consistency and reliability would be improved over what we have now," Ms. Higgins said. Also, an [avatar that moves its lips at the same time](#) would cost less than trying to find real people to sign for students in person or recording videos of a real person signing.

"The way it is now, you have who-knows-how-many people delivering these tests in all these states. This would be significantly cheaper," Ms. Higgins said.

While the computerized tests could address many of the challenges paper-and-pencil tests now pose for students with disabilities, tests could remain a challenge. (["Common Assessments Are a Test for Schools' Technology."](#) April 27, 2011.)

At Ms. Buck's 600-student school in Vermont, while computerized versions of the science test were available for 11th and 8th graders, they chose to use them only with 11th graders because the testing window was the same for both groups, and the school doesn't have the resources to give everyone the test at once.

And the tests still won't meet the needs of all students with special needs. The assessment consortia are charged with creating exams for all types of students. For the remaining 1 percent of students with significant cognitive disabilities, separate exams are being designed.

Regardless of the challenges, the new generation of tests will offer a huge advantage, Ms. Buck said, compared to that large-type paper tests. "The accommodating features are discreet. It's built in. They all took the assessment online. No one knew the person next to them was taking the test," she said. "We're stuck with assessments. If you can make them the best possible way for students for us to show what they know, that's the end of the road to find that best assessment."

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

D.C. Charters not keen on walk in the PARCC

Washington Post

By: Bill Turque

June 2, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/dc-schools-insider/post/charters-not-keen-on-walk-in-the-parcc/2011/06/02/AGVOnSHH_blog

As the District retools its standardized tests to align with the [Common Core](#) standards, the charter community is expressing concern that the new testing regime will limit schools' control over curriculum.

Under [PARCC](#) (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers), which the District currently plans as a replacement for the [CAS](#) (DC Comprehensive Assessment System) beginning in the 2014-15 academic year, schools will administer not just the usual exams but a series of three interim or ["through-course"](#) assessments during the year that will count toward AYP standing. Under the new system, schools were not accountable for interim assessments.

Robert Cane, executive director of FOCUS (Friends of Choice in Urban Schools), a charter advocacy group, said Thursday that PARCC as configured, threatens the rights of the publicly financed, independently operated schools to control their instructional programs.

"Leaving aside the question about whether we have enough testing, the problem with PARCC as designed is that it imposes a certain way of instruction," Cane said.

Charter school leaders aired other issues at a Thursday morning briefing on Common Core, convened by D.C. State Superintendent Hosanna Mahaley. One was that they had little to no say on PARCC's selection. Mahaley said it was a decision made by former n Fenty and his superintendent, Kerri Briggs.

There is some sentiment among charters for the other Common Core-themed exam under development, the [Smarter Balanced Ass](#) exams under Smarter Balanced are optional.

Mahaley said she understood the concerns and that the decision to go with PARCC was "not final." She pledged a place at the tab and to work with them on their objections.

"If there is overwhelming evidence that PARCC is not appropriate for this state, we will make another decision," she said.

At the briefing, D.C. officials walked through the timetable for phasing out the DC CAS. Next year's CAS reading test will be largely Common Core, with math to follow in 2013. Both would be replaced by PARCC in 2014.

To help schools prepare for the advent of the Common Core, OSSE has published a "crosswalk" listing the current D.C. standards of the new system. It can be viewed [here](#) .

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

Rules Set for Fresh Round of 'i3' Grants

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

June 3, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/06/03/33innovate.h30.html?tkn=XXZFhSstWfSysbRwhitntTc0IB3FovnlGgW5j&cmp=clp-edv>

The second round of the Investing in Innovation federal grant program will be a smaller, \$150 million contest for districts and nonpro fewer private-sector matching dollars, ask applicants to focus on rural schools, and change how evidence of past success is used process.

The U.S. Department of Education, which announced the guidelines on Friday, expects to give out as many as 22 awards in Decer ranging from \$3 million to \$25 million, with the largest awards going to proposals with the strongest research base, as in the first rc will be due in August.

Last summer, the department awarded \$650 million to 49 districts, schools, and their nonprofit partners to scale up promising prac largest individual awards also going to the applicants with strong track records. Awards ranged from \$50 million for the largest "sca which included the big-name groups Teach for America and the Knowledge Is Power Program, to \$5 million for the smallest, lesser- "development" winners.

In a significant change, the department has added improving rural achievement as a focus of the "i3" program. Rural-school advocat accused the department of designing programs that shut out rural schools, which advocates argue have a tougher time in competit often lack the resources of their big-city counterparts.

By deeming this an additional priority, the Education Department has signaled that it wants to step up interest in, and awards to, r programs. In fact, education officials said they might use their discretion to skip over high-scoring applications in other categories t the rural category.

"What we're doing is we're creating a space where rurals can compete against other rurals," said James H. Shelton III, the departn deputy secretary for innovation and improvement. "We have the flexibility to allow highest-scoring rurals to be among the winners." The other four priority areas for the competition are teachers and principals; standards and assessments; low-performing schools; ; technology, engineering, and math education, or STEM.

Two of the biggest areas of contention in the first round—requirements involving matching funds and evidence—also have changes An applicant's track record of success has been a key component of the i3 program, which is billed as supporting and scaling up "€ promising practices. But applicants will no longer be awarded points by the peer reviewers on that evidence; instead, it will be up to determine if applicants satisfy the requirements.

Judges will still award points based on the significance of the effect a program has on student outcomes. Previously, the departme competition's outside judges evaluated applicants' evidence in the first round, too, and found the process to be redundant and more necessary. "We tried to simplify it ... and make one single review" of the evidence, Mr. Shelton said.

To be eligible to compete, applicants still will have to meet the same thresholds for evidence as in the first round. For the \$25 millic awards, for example, that includes "strong" evidence, such as program evaluations that use random assignment of students.

Under the round-two grading scale, still based on 100 points, the need for the project will carry some of the strongest weight. It will percent to 35 percent of an applicant's grade, depending on the tier in which an applicant is competing. Each application also will b other factors: quality of project design, quality of the outside evaluation planned for the project if it wins, and quality of the managen personnel who will work with the grant.

As for the matching dollars, first-round applicants had to secure 20 percent from the private sector in order to win, which many fear burdensome for small communities with fewer resources, and for everyone in general given the tight economy. (All first-round i3 win their matches.) This time, "scale-up" winners will have to secure a 5 percent match, "validation" winners a 10 percent match, and "d winners a 15 percent match.

Much of the rest of the competition remains the same as the first round. For example, school districts and nonprofits that partner v groups of schools all will be eligible to compete.

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

The State of Teacher Evaluation in the State of Florida

Education Week

By: Justin Baeder

June 3, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on_performance/2011/06/the_state_of_teacher_evaluation_in_the_state_of_florida.html?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter

As I said in a [recent post](#), the teacher evaluation landscape is changing rapidly, and nowhere does accountability pressure mean a "reform"-friendly state of Florida.

Michelle Rhee has concentrated efforts of her organization [Students First](#) in states like Florida that have policy climates supportive of reforms. A [recent post](#) on StudentsFirst's website notes that

With these key education reforms becoming a reality in Florida, policy makers across the country will be looking to the Sunshine State for advice and guidance on how to improve schools nationally. We at StudentsFirst hope to help

And "help" they have. Florida lawmakers [passed](#) what state Rep. Erik Fresen (R-Miami) [called](#) "one of the boldest sessions regarding education policy," a statement that appears to be justified given the large number of education bills Gov. Rick Scott has signed. Among them are [increase charter school autonomy, expand vouchers to pay for private school, ease class-size limits, and expand online learning](#).

Most significant, though, is Senate Bill 736 (see [PDF FAQ from FEA](#)), which requires districts to develop a four-tier evaluation system based on 50% of ratings on student learning data (including FCAT scores when applicable). [University of South Florida professor Sherman D. Jones's analysis of SB 736](#) that focuses on the potential legal challenges that might be mounted against the law, which is worth a read. DC's reliance on test scores is based more on political fetishes than research, and wonders how it will affect teaching in performance-oriented schools such as band, which traditionally do not have paper-and-pencil end-of-course exams.

There are also measures in the law that tie pay to student test scores, end LIFO layoffs, and effectively eliminate tenure for new teachers, among other things.

I applaud the moves to end LIFO (last-in, first-out, AKA seniority-based layoffs) and implement a four-tier evaluation system, which is long overdue. I'm concerned, though, that the heavy reliance on ill-defined student test scores is not going to do anything helpful and will only create disincentives and fruitless upheaval.

I want to provide a platform for discussion of what these changes mean and how they are being rolled out, since what's happening in Florida is happening elsewhere (if at a slower pace). Since I neither live in Florida nor know very much about the state of education policy, I will link to the comments on SB 736 from educators who work in Florida. Because some of these issues may be sensitive, I will protect the identity of anyone who contacts me. You can email me at justin.baeder@gmail.com to share what you are seeing and experiencing as the changes roll out.

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

Scott signs voucher, baggy-pants bills

News Service of Florida

By: Brandon Larrabee

June 2, 2011

http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_politics/2011/06/scott-signs-voucher-baggy-pants-bills.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+news%2Fpolitics%2Fpoliticalpulse+%28Central+Florida+Tallahassee%29

TALLAHASSEE — A trio of bills overhauling state voucher programs and a measure cracking down on baggy pants at public schools were signed into law by Gov. Rick Scott on Thursday.

The four bills were among 48 measures Scott approved Thursday, according to an announcement by his office late in the day.

Two of the bills could increase, perhaps by thousands of students, the number of recipients of taxpayer funds to be put toward private schools.

One of the measures (HB 1329) could add 50,000 to the rolls by increasing the number of conditions that would qualify a student for an Opportunity Scholarship. The scholarship program targets students with disabilities.

Another (HB 1331) would make it easier for students in poorly performing schools to take advantage of the Opportunity Scholarship. Currently, students are eligible if their public school has received an F in a four-year period; the new law changes the definition of failing to include any school that received a D or F in the prior year.

In addition, the bill, which already allows students to use the scholarships at private schools, now permits students in failing public schools to attend a higher-rated public school anywhere in the state, instead of limiting that choice to adjacent districts.

Some Democrats at times complained that the measures could make it more difficult for public schools to improve, but the bills passed through the GOP-dominated Legislature.

Scott also signed a bill (HB 965) tweaking the corporate tax credit scholarship program. The measure allows companies that donate to a charitable organization to claim 100 percent of that donation as a corporate income tax credit. Current law only permits a credit of 75 percent.

And in a victory long sought by Sen. Gary Siplin, D-Orlando, Scott signed into law a bill (SB 228) that has become known around the state as the baggy pants bill. The new law requires school boards to adopt dress codes barring clothes that expose underwear or body parts in public.

vulgar manner.

Students could be punished with removal from extracurricular activities and in-school suspension. Siplin said he pushed the measure to make sure students understood how to dress well and improve their employment prospects after they graduated.

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

Two high school students had one last chance to graduate. Did they make

Orlando Sentinel

By: Erica Rodriguez

June 3, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-lk-graduations-20110603.0.7071114.story>

LEESBURG — Ja'Vonte' Hackney, an 18-year-old varsity football player and A-average student at Leesburg High School, almost certainly learned he probably wouldn't graduate.

He retook the standardized FCAT reading test required for graduation for the fourth time this school year, hoping to make the 300-point diploma. He failed by two points.

"That last time hurt me when I failed," he said. "I didn't think I was going to graduate at first."

Ashlea Kreidel, 17, another Leesburg senior, faced the same reality after she tried six times over the last two years to try to pass the test. She missed the grade by four points.

"I didn't think I was going to do it, but I tried to stay positive," she said, remembering crying when she heard the news.

Their only remaining hope: Pass the ACT, which can be used to substitute a failing FCAT score.

But neither Kreidel nor Hackney were going to give up their quest to graduate along with the 2,500 Lake County seniors who will retest today and Saturday. Both had enough credits to walk and passed the required math portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test on their first try.

Their struggle to overcome the reading FCAT on a first try is not unique. Only 54 percent of the 2,878 students who took the test at Leesburg and Kreidel in 2009 passed the first time. The number of Lake County students who passed the first time has consistently fallen a few points below the state average for the last three years.

Tenth graders in other Central Florida counties have struggled with the reading FCAT as well. Last year, more than 40 percent of Orange and Polk county students failed the test on the first try, trailing the state average.

School officials have different theories for why students don't do well in reading ranging from low parental involvement to harder test questions.

"Sometimes students have a hard time mastering those critical thinking skills," said Chris Patton, a spokesman for the Lake County Schools.

Slow reading gains among Leesburg High School's lowest achievers are the toughest obstacles for the campus to overcome. The school had to recover from years of D state ratings and missed a B rating last year because of the scores.

"I wasn't thinking I couldn't read," Hackney said, adding that he was making good grades in his advanced placement English class by focusing on reading about — that's my main focus."

Hackney said the FCAT reading passages were boring and could not hold his attention. Sample reading 2010 FCAT passages focused on an Australian anteater and a cell phone user manual. The ACT passages are shorter and more straightforward, Hackney said.

For Kreidel, the challenge to pass was even greater after having spent years in remedial reading classes.

With a few weeks until graduation, the two started studying for the ACT exam as a last-ditch effort to walk the stage. The school brought in private tutors to help 42 struggling students pass the college entrance exam. The two studied four weeks to learn new vocabulary and contextual clues. Then they took the test — and passed.

The experience taught them about failure, they say — and how not to give up.

"To get to the bridge of success, you have to walk through the streets of failure," Hackney said, adding that he plans to attend Bethune-Cookman University. "I said it time and time again because I kept failing the FCAT."

Kreidel, who plans to study dental hygiene at Lake-Sumter Community College, said her mom's encouragement and focus on getting a diploma instead of a certificate of completion got her through.

"I was thinking, 'keep trying and trying until you get it,'" Kreidel said. "I was going to get that diploma."

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

STATE NEWS

6 Ind. school districts testing new evaluation systems linking student score teacher pay

Associated Press

By: Staff

June 03, 2011

<http://www.dailyjournal.net/view/story/f8437a90badf4790962476a02540fe50/IN--Teacher-Evaluations/>

INDIANAPOLIS — Six Indiana school districts will be the first to try new teacher evaluation systems linking student performance w

A merit pay law passed this year requires teachers to be evaluated annually, and those ranked in the bottom two of four categories automatic pay raises. Local districts can create their own evaluation systems, but have to include objective measures of student ac as test scores.

A state-developed evaluation system will be tested next school year in Fort Wayne, Greensburg and Bloomfield. Three other distric Grove, Bremen and Warren Township in Indianapolis — are using locally developed evaluation systems that meet state criteria.

All Indiana school districts will have to adopt some evaluation system that meets state criteria by the 2012-2013 school year.

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

Opinion: Education has key role in economic revival

Detroit News

By: Editorial Board

June 2, 2011

<http://www.detnews.com/article/20110602/OPINION01/106020346/1008/opinion01/Editorial--Education-has-key-role-in-economic-rev>

Michigan urban education systems can learn from success of Harlem Children's Zone

Mackinac Island— Geoffrey Canada has a prime spot on the Detroit Regional Chamber's policy conference agenda today because leaders gathered on the island understand that the Michigan economy will continue to underperform until the state posts stronger e Canada is the father of the Harlem Children's Zone Project, an alternative education initiative launched in 1997 and now serving child some of the worst city blocks in America. The students covered by Canada's system of schools and social service programs have scores and graduation rates than children in other nearby public schools.

What he's learned can help Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids and other urban school districts prepare children for more productive future are now being failed by the education system.

Canada attacks education failure by first addressing the gaps in opportunities and culture faced by the children under his care. He | of resources, including support for pregnant mothers, early education programs, after-school activities, career guidance and health services.

Detroit gains possible

The heart of the Harlem project is the network of public and charter schools that are structured to meet the specific needs of urban says his work is replicable in other communities, and he has a special understanding of the problems that plague Detroit.

On Friday, Canada told The Detroit News that there is nothing he knows about Detroit that would prevent it from making gains simi Harlem. And he recognizes the urgent need for improvement. "Detroit really needs it," Canada says.

Recently named one of Time magazine's "100 most influential people," Canada argues passionately that success depends on crea environment that prepares young children to succeed in school, guides them through the perilous high school years with peer supp and counseling, and drives home the message that everything is designed to prepare them for college and career.

His approach is quite similar to that of Detroit's New Urban Learning, which runs the University Prep Academies built by Plymouth Robert Thompson.

With the cradle-to-college approach of the Harlem Children's Zone as the inspiration, the U.S. Department of Education launched th Neighborhoods program last year to fight poverty in urban and rural areas.

The nonprofit Guidance Center, which aids families throughout southeast Michigan, was awarded one of 21 \$500,000 planning gran Rouge Promise Neighborhoods Initiative.

The Guidance Center plans to work closely with three low-performing public schools in River Rouge, and could serve as a model for Detroit neighborhoods. Canada's work requires a huge commitment from the foundation and business communities.

Those types of folks are on the island today, when Canada is to speak.

Here is what they'll hear him say:

Have reasonable expectations. Don't attempt to fix Detroit Public Schools in one bite; start with individual neighborhoods within the from there.

Build a community. Declining population and decay had led to a loss of community attachment in Harlem. Now, Canada's neighbor transitioning from despair to hope and consequently, becoming a place where people want to return.

Start early. Canada says the science is clear: The earlier children can be reached, the better their chances of graduating and going Educating parents and getting them on board is an important part of this equation.

Reach as many young people as possible. Scale is vital when it comes to making education a way of life instead of an isolated abe Use data to ensure the approach is working. Canada uses statistics to highlight effectiveness — or areas for improvement. Similar system, such as teachers, must be held accountable for the performance of their students.

All must pitch in

But the driving point of his message today will be that educating children is not just the responsibility of the schools — everyone making sure all children are prepared to contribute to the economy, and to their communities.

Effective education is the foundation of a solid economy.

That Canada has a prominent platform on the island speaks to the fact that Michigan's business community understands its role in smarter.

Additional Facts: Geoffrey Canada

Occupation: President and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone Project in New York

Age: 59

Education: Canada has a master's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education

What is the Harlem Children's Zone? An approach to education that takes all aspects of a child's social and intellectual development into consideration, from parental involvement to after-school activities. It's also about rebuilding a community that lost population and infrastructure over the years. The Children's Zone covers 100 blocks in Harlem and reaches more than 20,000 individuals each year, half of whom are African American. Canada was launched into the public eye last year following the release of director Davis Guggenheim's popular documentary "Superman," which features Canada's work as a contrast to the failure of so many public schools.

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

Wisconsin: Amid protests, panel votes to expand school choice, cut aid to local governments

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

By: Patrick Marley

June 3, 2011

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/123059643.html>

Madison - The Legislature's budget committee - disrupted repeatedly by protesters opposed to Gov. Scott Walker - voted late Thursday to expand the state's school choice program to much of Racine County.

The sweeping plan adopted by the Joint Finance Committee on an 11-4 party-line vote would also eliminate the enrollment cap on the program and raise the income limits for the parents of those attending choice schools.

It would also allow choice students to attend private schools no matter where they were located, rather than just those based in Milwaukee. This means private schools in suburban Milwaukee - or even beyond the suburbs - could use taxpayer money to educate children from the eastern Racine County.

The expansion was incorporated into the state budget that the committee plans to finish on Friday or Saturday. It will then forward the plan to the Republican-controlled Legislature, which plans to pass it this month.

The budget panel also voted to cut aid to local governments by \$76.75 million over two years and keep intact the state's recycling program, which Walker had proposed dismantling.

But its progress was slow.

The committee meeting was to begin at 1 p.m., but Republicans who run the committee didn't start until shortly before 7 p.m. because they had no agreements among themselves until then. As soon as the meeting started, dozens of protesters repeatedly disrupted the meeting and they were hauled out by law enforcement.

Early on, Democrats on the committee yelled at the protesters to stop the interruptions.

"I happen to be on your side," Sen. Bob Jauch (D-Poplar) said.

When some loudly disagreed, Jauch responded: "I'm asking you to recognize you could do more harm than good" by disrupting the meeting.

For the first hour, protesters individually stood up and loudly talked over committee members. State troopers and police officers led them away as soon as they removed one, another stood and began speaking.

As protesters were taken out of the room, others chanted, "Police state!" and "Shame!" Disruptions became less frequent but continued throughout much of the meeting. Outside the room, a group sang "We Shall Overcome" and "Solidarity Forever."

About 25 people were escorted out of the meeting room and two were arrested, said Capitol Police Chief Charles Tubbs.

The committee began by softening cuts to local government that had been proposed by Walker. Walker planned to trim that aid by \$76.75 million over two years, but the committee reduced the aid by \$76.75 million instead.

The cuts were restructured so they benefited suburbs and other property-rich communities over poorer areas. Democrats called the measure "unfair."

"This is preferential treatment for those who have it, and punishment for those who don't," Jauch said.

The measure passed 11-4 on party lines. It would also allow local governments to make deep cuts in law enforcement. Under current law, they are prohibited from doing so.

to keep that funding at 2009 levels or higher.

The committee voted to put \$19 million a year toward the state's recycling program. Walker cut the program this year from \$32 million for the fiscal year that ends June 30 and had proposed eliminating all funding for it starting July 1.

Walker aides had backed off that plan after Walker's fellow Republicans reacted coolly to it, and his aides said in April they were in compromise to restore some funding.

School choice

The school choice plan would expand the program in a number of ways, including allowing an unlimited number of students into the program by raising the income limits for those who participate in it.

The current school choice program allows low-income students in Milwaukee to attend private schools, including religious schools, at the state's expense. Each voucher is worth \$6,442.

Opponents said the expansion was unfair and would cause property taxes to go up.

"It's mind-boggling, and quite frankly irresponsible, for legislators to continue to expand the school choice program and not even think about addressing the flaws that cause the loss in school aids and the increase in property taxes," a statement from Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett said.

But Rep. Robin Vos (R-Rochester), co-chairman of the committee, said the program has improved public education in Milwaukee and that

"Parents want it," Vos said. "Parents understand it."

He said the expansion was needed because Racine schools' graduation rates are an embarrassment. Some Racine students are "not here for life," he said.

Walker and school choice advocates also had wanted to bring school choice to Beloit and Green Bay, but the committee abandoned that idea. Vos said he thought school choice would be brought to Green Bay in years to come.

"It just seems like certain people weren't ready for that to happen in their community," Vos said of Green Bay.

Walker wanted to eliminate the income limits for those participating in the Milwaukee program, but the committee did not go that far. His proposal would raise the income limit from 175% to 300% of the federal poverty level for many families. Married couples would have a limit of \$7,000 above 300% of the poverty level.

The current limit is \$39,113 for a family of four. That would rise to \$67,050 for a family of four headed by a single parent, and \$74,050 for a family of four headed by a married couple.

Rep. Tamara Grigsby (D-Milwaukee) said raising the limits was counter to the 20-year-old program's original intention of helping low-income families.

"This was a program designed to help those who are disadvantaged, not those who are wealthy," Grigsby said. "This is nothing but a program for children."

Walker's plan to eliminate all income limits prompted criticism that the program would be open to wealthy people who could easily pay for tuition at private schools. Among those critical of the plan was longtime voucher proponent Howard Fuller.

Racine County

The program in Racine County would start this fall and initially have an income limit of 185% of the federal poverty level, or \$41,348. The income limit would rise to the same level as the Milwaukee program in the fall of 2012.

This fall, 250 children would be allowed in the Racine County program, 500 would be allowed in 2012, and an unlimited number would be allowed in 2013.

It would apply to students from the Racine Unified School District, which covers all communities in Racine County east of I-94.

The current program in Milwaukee is capped at 22,500 students. That limit would be eliminated under the plan. This year, 20,189 students were enrolled in the program.

If 1,000 more students attended choice schools, Milwaukee property taxes would be allowed to rise by \$2.5 million, according to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

The Assembly passed a separate bill last month that would eliminate the cap and allow Milwaukee County schools into the program, but the bill has not yet taken effect.

The committee also voted to eliminate the cap that limits enrollment in virtual charter schools to 5,250 students. But the panel did not make changes to charter schools Walker recommended, saying lawmakers would instead pass separate legislation addressing charter schools.

Massive, weeks-long protests in the Capitol began in February, when Walker proposed eliminating most collective bargaining for public employees. A plan passed the Legislature but has been stalled in court.

In recent weeks, protests have been steady but much smaller. But protesters are intensifying their efforts and plan to start a camp on Wisconsin State Street from the Capitol during the next few weeks.

The turmoil over collective bargaining has also prompted attempts to recall six Democratic senators and six Republican senators. A recall committee co-chairwoman Alberta Darling of River Hills.

"Hey, Darling, pink looks good on you!" one protester taunted Darling. "Get ready for your slip! Recall Darling!"

Jesse Garza and Lee Bergquist of the Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report from Milwaukee.

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