

**From:** [Sarah Powell \(Sarah@afloridapromise.org\) <sarah@afloridapromise.org>](mailto:Sarah@afloridapromise.org)  
**To:** [Undisclosed recipients:](#)  
**CC:**  
**Date:** Fri, 10/28/2011 10:08:26 AM  
**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 10/28/2011

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 10/28/11

For more education news, visit *The Ed Fly* at [www.TheEdFly.com](http://www.TheEdFly.com).

### NATIONAL NEWS

- 1) [Obama Using Education Issue as Political Sword](#); McNeil – Education Week
- 2) [Innovation Criteria Is a Model for Feds](#); Sparks – Education Week
- 3) [Navy Paying Students to Succeed on AP Tests](#); Mervis – Education Week
- 4) [Publishers Turn to Cloud Computing to Offer Digital Content](#); Ash – Education Week

### STATE NEWS

- 5) [Rhode Island to Seek Relief From U.S. Law](#); Staff – Providence Journal
- 6) [Bill would allow more Michigan 'cyber' schools](#); Staff – Associated Press
- 7) [Michigan Senate vote expands education options](#); Higgins – Detroit Free Press
- 8) [National report: West Virginia weak on teacher evaluations](#); Harris – Charleston Gazette

## NATIONAL NEWS

### Obama Using Education Issue as Political Sword

Education Week

By: Michele McNeil

October 27, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/28/10jobs.h31.html?tkn=NMZFFHEb3qwltiqAr2V4%2FCITr5%2B4f2aCiubh&cmp=clp-edweek>

With President Barack Obama's jobs plan stalled in Congress and his re-election bid saddled by low approval numbers and high unemployment, his administration is using its record on education—and that of congressional Republicans—as a political weapon as Campaign 2012 heats up.

Even though the Senate earlier this month rejected a \$35 billion piece of a \$447 billion package the administration said would save an estimated 400,000 teacher jobs, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and his top officials used speeches in a number of states to emphasize how many education jobs they say are at stake there: 12,000 in Michigan, 14,500 in Illinois, 5,100 in Utah.

Meanwhile, President Obama is playing up the deadlock in Congress and rolling out education initiatives his administration can do on its own. Prime examples: the waiver plan unveiled in September to grant states flexibility on key requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, and a plan announced earlier this week to give relief to debt-burdened student-loan borrowers.

"We can't wait for Congress to do its job. ... [W]e couldn't just wait for Congress to fix No Child Left Behind. We went ahead and decided, let's give states the flexibility they need to meet higher standards for our kids and improve our schools," Mr. Obama said in a [speech on Wednesday](#) at the University of Colorado Denver.

And, turning to a new proposal that will help cap student-loan payments and make it easier to consolidate some federal loans, he said: "We're going to put them into effect not three years from now, not two years from now—we're going to put them into effect next year, because our economy needs it right now."

#### ***Political Volley***

The student-loan debt issue is the latest political volley in a furious back-and-forth between the president and Republicans, who are trying to blame each other for the poor economy with high unemployment and sluggish growth forecasted to continue well into the general-election season next year.

In September, Mr. Obama unveiled the [American Jobs Act](#) as a comprehensive package to help jump-start the economy by spending money on teacher jobs and infrastructure, including \$25 billion to modernize K-12 schools.

But since then, Congress has been picking it apart and shooting it down, bit by bit.

The failure of the \$35 billion proposal to help secure the jobs of teachers, police, and firefighters sparked widespread criticism from national and local teachers' unions, which used the 50-50 vote, which was 10 votes shy of the 60 needed to break a filibuster in the Senate, to criticize senators who nixed the plan, including Massachusetts Republican Sen. Scott Brown.

"Today is a day that Scott Brown's vote is going to negatively impact Massachusetts families and children," Paul Toner, the president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, said in a conference call with reporters after the measure failed. Sen. Brown responded that the criticism was merely "political theater," according to the Associated Press.

Next week, the Senate is scheduled to take up a part of the American Jobs Act that would invest \$60 billion in infrastructure—but its focus is on transportation. According to Senate summaries of the legislation, it would not include any money for the school modernization Mr. Obama wants. Still, the administration is hoping the school proposal eventually will get its turn in the spotlight.

Department officials have used speeches by a number of officials to tout the legislation.

On Thursday, when Linda Hall, the Education Department's director of rural outreach, went to Virginia for a technical-assistance workshop for rural schools, the department sent out a press release promoting the jobs act and how her visit would help highlight its benefits.

That same day, the assistant secretary for special education, Alexa Posny, gave remarks in Oregon at a summit on dispute resolution in special education—and talked up the jobs act.

### ***Leap-Frogging Congress***

The Obama administration has also emphasized initiatives that would not require congressional authority. The student-loan plan marked the third initiative the administration rolled out in a week. (The two others involved helping veterans and mortgage holders.)

The student-loan relief will accelerate an income-based loan-repayment plan Congress approved in 2010. Under the plan adopted last year, loan repayments were slated to be capped at 10 percent of discretionary income beginning in 2014. Mr. Obama will start the 10 percent cap in 2012. Anyone who takes out a student loan next year will be eligible.

Administration officials estimate the change will lower payments for 1.6 million borrowers. In addition, the plan will make it easier for students to consolidate certain federal loans.

"These are real savings that will help these graduates get started on their careers," Secretary Duncan said in a conference call held with reporters last week.

The plan sparked immediate criticism from Republicans.

U.S. Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., the chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, said President Obama's student-loan plan would do "nothing to help the nation's unemployed workers." He [said in a statement](#) the plan would "encourage more borrowing across the board. That means more debt for students, more debt for taxpayers, and more red ink on the government's books."

Instead, Mr. Kline urged the president to "get off the campaign trail" and work with Congress to enact 15 House-passed jobs bills that include free-trade agreements and proposals to loosen environmental regulations.

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

## **Innovation Criteria Is a Model for Feds**

Education Week

By: Sarah D. Sparks

October 27, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/26/10innovation.h31.html>

The U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Fund's model of awarding bigger grants in return for greater evidence of program effectiveness may become the new norm for federal education and social programs, if a wide-scale interagency initiative proves successful.

The i3 program sets aside different pots of money based on the level of research evidence that undergirds a project. The idea is to encourage developers to scale up proven programs and strategies while at the same time seeding research on less-tested ideas.

Developed as part of the 2009 fiscal-stimulus law, the i3 program has just received a strong application pool for its second, \$150 million grant competition for fiscal 2011. ("[Demand Strong for \\$150 Million in Latest 'i3' Cash.](#)" October 26, 2011.)

It's one of six new federal programs that are using tiered levels of grants to encourage developers to build a research case for social programs.

“There’s a need to build capacity both within the agencies and among the grantees about how to evaluate what constitutes good evidence,” said Jon Baron, president of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, a Washington-based advocacy group. “I think the Department of Education is playing a lead role in bringing other agencies up to that level.”

In addition to i3, the grants include:

- The Workforce Innovation Fund, a \$125 million program operated under the U.S. Department of Labor partnering with the Education Department to develop and scale up strategies to improve education and employment for workers;
- The Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants Program, a Labor Department initiative that is receiving \$2 billion from 2011 to 2014 to create and expand education and career-training programs for dislocated workers;
- Money to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, totaling \$1.5 billion from 2010 to 2014, for developing evidence-based home-visit programs for at-risk families with young children;
- Another \$105 million to HHS in fiscal 2011 for the development of evidence-based, teenage-pregnancy-prevention programs; and
- The Social Innovation Fund, a \$50 million pot of money under the Corporation for National and Community Service to support public-private partnership investment in evidence-based programs in low-income communities.

Each program, like i3, provides larger grants to interventions that show strong evidence of their impact, up to and including randomized controlled trials, the so-called gold-standard in research. They also allot smaller grants to encourage practitioners to experiment with promising-but-untested interventions in ways that build in research evaluations from the start.

### ***Seeding Partnerships***

“Our old model was program dollars go out every few years ... then we have research and evaluation dollars on a separate silo, and they’re all competing for resources,” said Kathy Stack, the deputy associate director for education and human resources at the federal Office of Management and Budget, in a presentation in Washington last month on the interagency initiative that led to the creation of the programs.

The series of tiered-evidence grants is intended to encourage more partnerships between researchers and practitioners, Ms. Stack added, “to say, ‘You need each other, and we’re going to provide financial incentives for you to work together to learn, to build on existing evidence, learn what works, and produce new evidence that can support the growth of best practices and enable people to see what doesn’t work and find a graceful way of walking away from that to do the other stuff.’”

Awarding grants based on different levels of evidence also helps “cut through tremendous politics” that can surround hot-button education and social issues, Ms. Stack said. For example, the teenage-pregnancy-prevention grants in HHS are open to practitioners using both comprehensive and abstinence-only sex education programs. “We basically said, ‘Hey, we’re going to be neutral. There’s room for everybody under this tent. You just have to demonstrate that you get better outcomes,’” she said, “and that managed to calm down the politics.”

However, linking program evaluations to the size of grants awarded may encourage more people to game those research studies or focus on serving children who can improve with less help, according to Robert C. Granger, the president of the William T. Grant Foundation in New York.

Moreover, increasing the rigor of evidence required for a program generally leads to fewer people meeting that bar; in i3, for example, only 46 of nearly 1,700 applicants received grants, which provoked some criticism.

“Because in this process there are more losers than winners, what you have is a political constituency for spreading the money around,” said Mr. Granger, a member of the advisory board for the Institute of Education Sciences, the Education Department’s research arm.

That sort of congressional budget politics may shut down many of the programs before they have time to take root. House appropriators have cut evidence-based programs in HHS and Labor in the fiscal 2012 budget, though the Senate has so far protected them.

“The key to furthering this way of thinking—to steer money towards programs and policies that actually cause kids to do better in this world—is to make sure we learn things [from the research] that are useful to people who aren’t getting the money,” Mr. Granger said.

Even if the competitive programs don’t last, a September [report](#)  for the United Kingdom’s National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts suggests the U.S. interagency initiative may represent “a new chapter in the generation and use of evidence by the federal government.”

Ron Haskins, a co-director of the Center on Children and Families at the Washington-based Brookings Institution and a co-author of the British report, said the competitive grant programs could be the tip of the iceberg, as all federal agencies are changing their criteria for grant programs to require research evidence.

“This is a much broader strategy than the six evidence-based initiatives and if fully implemented could have a huge impact on federal social programs,” he said.

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

## Navy Paying Students to Succeed on AP Tests

Education Week

By: Jeffery Mervis

October 27, 2011

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/27/10stem\\_ep.h31.html?tkn=MRZFIGjS5pCYAVcj2iIHaaTuNdqgQOId%2FOI9&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/10/27/10stem_ep.h31.html?tkn=MRZFIGjS5pCYAVcj2iIHaaTuNdqgQOId%2FOI9&cmp=clp-edweek)

The question, in a call last spring from the White House, seemed innocent enough: Would the Navy be interested in funding an expansion of a private-sector program encouraging high school students to take more rigorous math and science courses into schools that serve large numbers of military dependents? Its support would help promote a new, high-profile White House effort to help the nation's armed forces and their families. But in agreeing to participate, the Navy also put itself ahead of the curve on federal education policy by embracing the untested and controversial idea of paying students who do well on standardized tests.

Cash incentives to students and their teachers are a core element of the 4-year-old, Texas-based [National Math and Science Initiative](#), or NMSI, which targets low-achieving and low-income high schools with large minority populations. NMSI leaders believe that those schools can improve the quality of instruction by offering more Advanced Placement courses, on the assumption that their students can handle more challenging material if given the chance. The incentives are part of a well-structured program that also features extra lab equipment, Saturday classes, and special training for teachers.

The Obama administration has no official position on the use of cash incentives, and Congress has never addressed the topic in legislation. At the same time, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has voiced support for the concept as a tool for raising student achievement, and a small departmental program to foster participation in AP courses allows officials to give money directly to students. However, only two of the 55 current grantees are doing so.

Despite the fact that it would be entering uncharted waters, the Navy decided to proceed. Reaching schools that serve a large number of military families is a good way to address the Navy's concern about finding enough U.S. citizens to fill the science- and technology-based jobs required to wage modern warfare, said Michael Kassner, the director of research at the Office of Naval Research and head of the Navy's STEM—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—office. “We know that students whose parents are in the military are more likely to go into the military,” he noted.

Mr. Kassner also had the money. The Navy is in the midst of doubling, to more than \$100 million, its investment over five years in STEM education at all levels. “The AP test appears to be successful in improving a student's skills,” said Mr. Kassner, a former professor of aerospace engineering at the University of Southern California. “And we thought NMSI looked like a good way to go.”

Mr. Kassner agreed to the White House's offer to sign onto a program, called the Initiative for Military Families, that brings the NMSI model to schools serving a large number of military families. The White House effort is part of Joining Forces, a program launched in April that received a national shout-out from first lady Michelle Obama before the start of this year's first World Series game in St. Louis.

NMSI officials compiled a list of 154 schools around the country near military installations and screened them for their willingness to follow NMSI's formula. At the end of September, the Office of Naval Research [announced](#) a \$1.1 million grant to NMSI to conduct a three-year pilot at three public schools in Virginia and Hawaii. Mr. Kassner says the Navy is open to funding many more schools if the initiative shows it's capable of priming the STEM pump to meet the Navy's needs.

### ***Missing the Target?***

At one level, NMSI's approach appears to be working well: In the midst of a nationwide surge in AP test-taking, the number of minority and female students passing those tests at 228 NMSI-sponsored schools this year increased four to 10 times faster than for the country as a whole. Apart from the initiative's own data, however, there is scant evidence in the research literature that the program can deliver the talent sought by the Navy and a host of other employers.

Kirabo Jackson, a labor economist at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., has looked at the Texas precursor to NMSI. His 2008 study is perhaps the only one to take a comprehensive look at the role of incentives in the targeted population, although it doesn't measure the impact of incentives apart from the other program elements.

Mr. Jackson found that the strategy increased AP participation rates and boosted the number of students with high scores on national college-entrance tests. At the same time, he found the program didn't increase high school graduation rates or the number of students taking college-entrance exams. That result, he said, suggests it's more likely to help high-achievers already headed to college than to raise the aspirations of those who hadn't planned to continue their education.

The jury is still out, Mr. Jackson said, on whether efforts to promote AP courses with cash incentives actually result in the kind of payoff that the Navy is hoping for, namely, more students with college degrees in STEM fields from high-quality institutions.

Still, his overall assessment of the program is positive.

"It's one of the few programs that does something good for these students," Mr. Jackson said. "Most programs haven't been evaluated rigorously. And I don't know if it can be expanded to other settings, with other populations. But if a school district had \$1 million to spend, I think a program like this is a good investment."

A 2010 [study](#) by economist Roland Fryer Jr. of Harvard University delivers a much more sobering message about the value of cash incentives for younger students. Mr. Fryer conducted a randomized trial of experimental programs in four large urban districts involving 38,000 children in grades 2-9. Although the program elements varied greatly from one district to the next, he found that paying for outputs, such as test results, didn't work and in some cases resulted in lower scores. On the other hand, he found that paying students for inputs—showing up for class, staying on task, reading a certain number of books—had a positive effect.

Mr. Fryer speculated that students who don't understand, for example, how hard work translates into better test scores are less likely to be motivated by the promise of cash rewards at the end of the term than by immediate reinforcements. "Student incentives based on inputs produce similar gains in achievement at lower costs," he concludes in a paper posted by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

An Education Department official who requested anonymity acknowledges that paying students is controversial. "Poor kids don't always know how to do well on tests by taking the time to study and by learning how to take a test," the official notes. The official also admits that the NMSI approach assumes that "passing an AP test is a good thing—which is a big assumption."

NMSI officials recognize that the program sets a high bar that may be difficult for some schools to clear. A school in which five students passed AP biology last year, for example, would be expected to record 37 passing scores this year, said Gregg Fischer, the director of the initiative's AP training and incentive program. If its success rate was 16 percent last year, he said, that would mean enrolling some 200 students this year.

### **'Lukewarm' to Cash**

At Green Run High School in Virginia Beach, Va., one of the schools getting Navy funding to pursue the NMSI program, many students "come in without all of the tools they need to succeed in an AP course," said Principal George Parker. As a result, the school's success rate to date on the end-of-year standardized tests has been in the single digits for some AP math and science courses. About one-fourth of the school's 1,640 students come from military families. That student population has a high mobility rate. The Joining Forces initiative hopes to provide a seamless transition for those students when their families relocate. (["Schools May Be Asked to Report on Progress of Military Children."](#) May 11, 2011.)

But Mr. Parker says that the money—students receive \$100 for each math, science, and English AP test on which they score at least a 3, on a 5-point scale, and teachers earn \$100 for every successful student, with the possibility of bonuses up to \$3,000 for increasing AP participation—isn't the real objective.

"The rigor of taking an AP course better prepares students for college, even if the students don't pass the final exam," he said. Many students are so far "lukewarm" toward the program, he added, because of the extra work required to be eligible for the payments. And Mr. Parker doesn't think that the bonuses provide any additional motivation for his teachers to do their jobs well.

In many states, teachers' unions are adamantly opposed to cash incentives. In addition to clashing with most labor agreements, incentives are viewed as undermining the learning process. In New York City, for example, the United Federation of Teachers declined to participate in that component of a program serving 31 schools that is otherwise modeled after the NMSI efforts. And in October, officials for the local nonprofit that runs the program, REACH, for Rewarding Achievement, decided to drop the student incentives as well when faced with a budget squeeze.

"We found that it prompted more students to take AP courses, but we didn't see the magnitude effect that we had hoped," says Kathrine Mott, REACH's executive director. However, Ms. Mott says that her organization will continue to offer professional development for teachers, Saturday classes, and classroom grants.

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

## **Publishers Turn to Cloud Computing to Offer Digital Content**

Education Week

By: Katie Ash

October 19, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2011/10/19/01cloud.h05.html>

While many schools are struggling to strike a balance between print and digital curricula for students, textbook publishers are taking to the cloud to house new digital resources and curricula.

But cloud computing is something K-12 schools are just beginning to dip their toes into, experts say, largely due to the lack of resources to shore up the technological infrastructure needed to tap into the cloud, described as the information and power available from servers hosted by a separate, off-site entity. For example, Google's tools, such as email and spreadsheets, are

considered in the cloud because users tap into information and platforms that are hosted on Google's servers versus their own.

"Obviously, schools are all over the board in terms of bandwidth and hardware support," says Randall Reina, the senior vice president for the Center for Digital Innovation at the New York City-based textbook publisher McGraw-Hill.

Unlike digital textbooks, which can be online but are also stored on hard drives or CDs, a cloud-based textbook is stored on the Internet by servers not operated by school districts themselves.

McGraw-Hill's cloud-based textbook platform, called [Cinch](#), incorporates the company's curriculum into a Web 2.0 format, in which students can start discussions with each other about the content, complete interactive assessments and activities, and search Google or Wikipedia for further information.

Cinch is available in grades 5-12 for science and K-12 in math.

"[Cinch] allows students to interact with each other around the content and allows the teacher to post questions and start a discussion thread around a certain part of the book," says Reina. "The goal is to make the teacher more effective."

That goal is shared by Heather Borowski, the director of instructional media and communications for the 2,900-student Decatur, Ga., schools.

Her district outfitted all K-9 classrooms with interactive whiteboards, and two years ago, it upgraded its online bandwidth to support technology tools and solutions such as cloud computing.

Half the K-5 math classrooms in Borowski's district piloted Cinch during the 2010-11 school year; at the end of the year, the district compared learning gains between the classrooms that used Cinch and those that did not. They found that the teachers who most often used Cinch had the largest learning gains in math.

"It's been a great success," says Borowski. "It's easy to differentiate learning using Cinch. When a teacher is setting up the portal for when that child logs in, she can individualize what he is going to see and what kind of lesson he will get, so not everybody is playing the same game or doing the same activity."

The Decatur district will be rolling out Cinch to all its elementary schools this school year, says Borowski.

### ***Personalizing Lessons***

Being able to individualize instruction easily is a major advantage of cloud-based curricula, says Mike Evans, the senior vice president for mathematics at the London-based textbook publisher Pearson.

Pearson's middle-grades math program [Digits](#), built from the ground up around common-core standards, runs on cloud-based architecture and provides many of the same Web 2.0 features that Cinch does.

"This is an opportunity to make sure that it's not a one-size-fits-all curriculum," says Evans. "At certain intervals, each student will take a benchmarks-type test where we'll be able to assess how they're doing. By understanding [a student's] strengths and weaknesses, the program creates a personalized study plan for each student so they can be working on the foundational skills that they may have trouble with."

In addition, the homework students complete is online, says Evans, and when teachers log in to the program in the morning, they can see what homework areas their students may have struggled with and adjust instruction for the day.

Having homework automatically scored and sent to the teacher saves time and allows the teacher to spend more time on individualizing instruction, says Evans.

However, most schools are not ready to move to a completely digital curriculum, he says.

"School districts in general recognize that they won't be able to snap their fingers and turn off print and switch on digital," Evans says. "But schools now see what's possible using digital curriculum. They have an appetite for it, and interest in it is very high."

Schools that currently use Digits work with individual students who may not have access to the Internet at home to set up times for them to work either at school or in public libraries, he says.

Peter Cohen, the chief executive officer of Pearson's school division, also concedes there is progress to be made.

"I think we'll stay on this trend of more and more schools moving in [this] direction, but I've talked to some very large districts [that] don't have the capacity or resources to move to an all-digital curriculum," Cohen says. "There are very few people who buy just the online program."

Most schools want an arrangement that provides digital elements along with a print textbook, he says.

Pearson has also launched the Online Learning Repository, in Texas, that allows teachers to pull content from Pearson, the Web, and their own materials, and store it in the repository so it can easily be shared with other teachers. So far, the repository

is available for science-related materials.

“This is probably the first phase of what cloud-based teaching and cloud-based instruction is going to be all about,” Cohen says.

### ***‘Richer, Real-Time Resources’***

Allowing an even distribution of resources across states and districts is one of the major advantages of cloud computing in education, says Eric N. Wiebe, an associate professor of STEM education at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, and a senior research fellow at the Friday Institute, an initiative within NCSU’s college of education to promote technology in education.

“The cloud is a tool for education equity,” he says. “The resources that urban and suburban and rural school districts have are not necessarily the same, and in fact, cloud computing is helping to flatten some of that bumpiness.”

Wiebe is part of an initiative at North Carolina State called [Scaling Up STEM Learning with the Virtual Computing Lab](#), which uses cloud computing to allow about a dozen high schools in the state to access STEM software they otherwise could not afford or support in the subjects of science, technology, engineering, and math.

“The cloud lowers those logistical barriers to distributing resources and allows access to richer, real-time resources,” Wiebe says.

The software, Geometer’s Sketchpad 5 and Fathom, is used in geometry and algebra classes and can help students better visualize mathematical concepts, he says.

In addition to saving money by more efficiently distributing resources, cloud computing provides data storage and services at a scale that makes it much cheaper for schools than if they were to rely on their own servers.

For example, in 2010, the Kentucky Department of Education and the Microsoft Corp. launched a suite of tools—email, scheduling, and collaboration services—that is expected to save the state \$6.3 million over four years.

Although cloud computing can potentially save schools and districts money, it does require an initial investment in technology. Instead of spending those funds on servers to house data and powerful desktops to run the applications, cloud computing requires schools to spend money on upgrading bandwidth and providing students with lightweight devices such as tablets and netbooks to access the resources, Wiebe says.

Cloud computing makes it much easier to modify and correct educational resources instantaneously, he says. For example, cloud computing makes it possible to embed links to news articles about current events in resources for students.

### ***Power of Collaboration***

The real power—and cost savings—of cloud computing will come from statewide and districtwide collaborations, says Mike King, the vice president of the global education industry for Armonk, N.Y.-based IBM.

“I would really encourage [school districts] to think collaboratively with other institutions within their states,” he says, “and begin to look at how do they really leverage the cost savings and build a much more student-centered environment across educational systems.”

Such collaborations would allow student data to carry over from one district to another, says King, as well as the sharing of resources between schools. However, he too has not seen cloud computing enter the mainstream in K-12.

“We will continue to see the requirement to have a solid network infrastructure [to access the cloud], and that’s going to remain a challenge for districts,” King says.

Nicole Wahab, the executive director of the 120-student Coleman Tech Charter High School in San Diego, says students and teachers at her school regularly use cloud computing to collaborate and communicate with one another.

Each 80-minute class is broken up into two segments—40 minutes of group instruction with an interactive whiteboard and 40 minutes of project-based learning. During the group-instruction portion, students collaborate on a shared Google document that allows them to take notes and discuss topics with their peers in real time.

“You’re able to put that into a shared document, and when you go home, it’s a real-time written record of exactly what happened in class,” Wahab says. “[Students] are gaining a skill set of remote collaboration.”

The school, which was launched last year with 9th and 10th graders and will expand to 11th grade this year, has invested in Acer computers for each student, making it a 1-to-1 laptop environment. The school uses open-source software, such as Open Office, to cut costs, and Google Apps to tap into cloud-based services, such as Google documents, Gmail, and Google spreadsheets.

“We’ve relinquished the idea that everything has to come from a textbook,” says Wahab. “The expert is the one who understands how to facilitate the kids in their own quest.”

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

## **STATE NEWS**

### **Rhode Island to Seek Relief From U.S. Law**

Providence Journal

By: Staff

October 28, 2011

<http://www.districtadministration.com/news/rhode-island-seek-relief-us-law>

Rhode Island will join a majority of states in requesting relief from the controversial national education law, No Child Left Behind.

However, Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist recently told the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education that the state would wait until February to apply for a waiver, bypassing the first opportunity in November.

Gist said she plans to hold public meetings to gather ideas from parents, teachers, principals and superintendents about what needs to be changed. Based on that feedback, the state Department of Education will develop its application, she said.

President Obama announced in September the U.S. Department of Education would allow states to apply for the waivers, which grant flexibility from some No Child Left Behind provisions.

One of the most criticized aspects of the law was its requirement that all students be proficient in reading and math by 2014, a deadline no state is on target to meet.

The waiver would exempt states from that goal, while requiring them to embrace other changes including: tough high school graduation standards that prepare students for good-paying jobs and college; dramatic improvements to the worst-performing schools; and new teacher evaluations that include student growth and performance.

Rhode Island has already embarked on those initiatives as part of the state's successful Race to the Top grant that is bringing in \$75 million to Rhode Island over four years for school improvements.

Many educators have criticized No Child Left Behind, saying it places too much emphasis on standardized test scores, penalizes schools with low test scores even as they strive to improve and sets unrealistic expectations on schools and teachers to have all students reach proficiency by 2014.

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

### **Bill would allow more Michigan 'cyber' schools**

Associated Press

By: Staff

October 27, 2011

<http://www.annarbor.com/news/bill-would-allow-more-michigan-cyber-schools/>

The bill that would allow the opening of more online, virtual schools was passed by a 20-18 vote with six Republicans joining Democrats in opposition. The measure advances to the Republican-led House, along with other bills that would allow more high school/college dual enrollment options and opportunities for private school and home-schooled students to take classes in public schools.

State law currently allows two cyber charter schools, with a combined enrollment of about 1,400 this school year, to operate in Michigan. The legislation would lift the cap on the number of schools and enrollment.

The Michigan Chapter of the [National Coalition for Public School Options](#) says the state's cyber charter schools have long waiting lists and parents want more opportunities to enroll.

Sen. **Phil Pavlov**, R-St. Clair Township, said not allowing cyber school expansion would be going against a trend of using more technology in education and society. Pavlov supports offering families more choice in how and where they use public education systems.

"We open it up, we let parents and students decide," said Pavlov, chair of the Senate Education Committee.

Democrats opposing the bill said there is not enough data to support lifting the cap on the number of cyber schools. Opponents said lawmakers should wait for evidence the schools, which opened in 2010-11, are effective before authorizing more of them.

Sen. **Steve Bieda**, D-Warren, cautioned against using cyber schools as a "cheap way of providing a second-rate service" instead of traditional building-based public schools.

In other bills, Republicans voted to expand options for students to enroll in college classes while they're still in high school.

Some of those options would be expanded to private schools and home-schooled students.

Other bills advancing to the House would allow more options for private school and home-schooled students to take classes in public schools.

The House is considering a Senate-approved bill that would lift the cap on charter schools allowed in Michigan. And a bill that remains in a Senate committee would mandate that Michigan's public school districts participate in the state's "schools of choice" program, which allows students to enroll in schools outside of the districts where they live if space is available.

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

## Michigan Senate vote expands education options

Detroit Free Press

By: Lori Higgins

October 27, 2011

<http://www.freep.com/article/20111027/NEWS06/111027026/Michigan-Senate-vote-expands-education-options>

The Michigan Senate passed six bills today that will give parents more options for their children's education.

The bills are part of a nine-bill package – dubbed the Parent Empowerment Reform legislation – that has been moving through the Senate in recent weeks.

Bills approved today would:

- Lift the cap on the number of cyber charter schools that can open and lift the cap on the number of students that can enroll in those cyber schools
- Expand opportunities for private school students and home-schooled students to take classes in public schools
- Expand opportunities for public schools to provide services for private schools
- Expand opportunities for public and private students to be dual-enrolled – taking both high school and community college classes.

The bills now move to the state House for consideration.

The Senate earlier this month passed the main bill in the package that would lift the statewide cap on the number of charter schools that universities can authorize.

That bill will also lift restrictions that prevented charter schools from opening in districts that have graduation rates that are above 75%

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

## National report: West Virginia weak on teacher evaluations

Charleston Gazette

By: Amy Julia Harris

October 25, 2011

<http://wvgazette.com/News/201110250208>

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- West Virginia has made little to no progress in adopting a teacher evaluation system that factors student achievement and performance into its teacher ratings, the National Council on Teacher Quality said in a report released Wednesday.

While there has been a national movement to tie student performance to teacher quality, West Virginia has one of the weakest education systems linking student performance to teacher effectiveness, said the report.

"Much like schools' tendency to "teach to the middle," teachers have been evaluated to the middle," said the report. "The disregard for performance in education has bred massive dysfunction and has disastrous consequences for the health of the teaching profession and for student achievement, especially for students most in need of effective teachers."

West Virginia was among only 11 states that does not require annual evaluations for all teachers, use student growth and achievement data to evaluate teachers, or have a system to fire teachers when they receive unsatisfactory ratings, said the report.

Across the nation, 32 states and the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) have made some change to their state teacher evaluation policy in the last three years, according to the nonpartisan National Council on Teacher Quality. Twenty-four states and DCPS require annual evaluations of all teachers and in 18 states and DCPS, teachers are eligible for dismissal based on

teacher evaluation results.

"A system that treats every teacher the same or fine isn't getting us the results we need, especially with student achievement levels being where they are," said Sandi Jacobs, vice president of the National Council on Teacher Quality. "We cannot continue with the status quo."

Jacobs said even in states like West Virginia that have "barebones" evaluation systems, there is something on the books to evaluate teachers, albeit standards that are extremely watered down.

"For a long time states didn't think they could change these [evaluation] policies, didn't think they could make them more rigorous, because there was too much opposition in the statehouse from teacher's unions," Jacobs said.

Under current state law, teachers in West Virginia are evaluated at least two times a year when they are in their first and second years of teaching. Teachers in their third, fourth and fifth years of teaching are evaluated at least once a year. If teachers with more than five years of experience have not received an unsatisfactory rating, the state no longer evaluates them.

Of the nearly four pages in West Virginia's teacher evaluation law detailing what criteria should be used to judge a state teacher's effectiveness -- which includes skill in implementing curriculum, setting high standards for students and striving to meet goals -- student achievement is not taken into account.

The West Virginia Department of Education is taking the first steps to change that.

It launched a teacher evaluation task force in 2009 comprised of teachers' union representatives, superintendents, principals and teachers to create a more high-stakes system to assess teacher effectiveness, said Lowell Johnson, a member of the state Board of Education.

Twelve counties -- Berkeley, Doddridge, Hampshire, Hardy, Kanawha, Lincoln, Marion, McDowell, Nicholas, Ohio, Roane, and Wood -- have piloted the state's evaluation system in the last few months and will report back to the Department of Education on how the new system is working in their schools.

The revised evaluation system requires some emphasis on student performance, Johnson said. Teachers are required to set goals for students and show how these student goals are being achieved through systematic reports to the principal, he said.

"While test scores are important, the test scores on the children should be just one indicator for how well teachers are doing," said Johnson. "That's the reason that we decided in the pilot that teachers should provide evidence of what they're doing to improve students' achievement."

And if a teacher is found unsatisfactory?

"We're going to provide them with help and professional development," he said. "But if you repeatedly can't perform the work, you're not helping students. Then it might be time to find a different job."

The state Department of Education task force will meet Nov. 2 to continue working on the new evaluation system and pilot.

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