

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

CCSSO to Congress, Obama: Write a Bipartisan NCLB Bill

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

January 5, 2012

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2012/01/ccsso_to_congress_obama_write.html

With Republicans on the House education committee [poised](#) to release a GOP-only bill to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Council of Chief State School Officers is calling on education leaders in the House to come together to pass bipartisan legislation.

"We hope that Congress and the administration will not miss the chance to focus on fundamental areas of agreement and work together," the chiefs wrote today to President Obama, House and Senate leaders, and lawmakers focused on K-12 policy.

The administration's [plan](#) to offer states wiggle room from key parts of the NCLB law is helpful, but it's not a substitute for an honest-to-goodness reauthorization, CCSSO writes. The group thinks the [bill](#) passed out of the Senate education committee last fall represents a starting point for "good faith floor debate" in the Senate.

So why this letter now?

CCSSO doesn't say this, but folks are worried that a partisan process in either chamber could all but scuttle reauthorization until after the presidential election. Congress is divided right now, so if CCSSO (and others) want a bill sooner rather than later, it'll have to be a bipartisan product in the end.

Check out the full letter [here](#).

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House to Release Teacher, Accountability Bills This Week

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

January 5, 2012

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2012/01/the_house_education_committee.html

The House education committee will put out draft bills this week that address the issues at the heart of the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act—teacher quality and accountability, Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., said this morning on Bill Bennett's radio show "Morning in America."

Kline, chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, didn't elaborate on the substance of the bills. But it does sound like this is going to be yet another blow to Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP, the law's signature yardstick. The

administration's [waiver package](#) and an NCLB reauthorization bill that [passed](#) out of the Senate education committee last year essentially scrap AYP as it's used now.

Kline doesn't like it either.

"The Adequate Yearly Progress measurement was always going to be unworkable," Kline said, calling it "a huge intrusion of federal government into K-12 education."

Still, big questions remain, such as whether Kline will require teacher evaluations, and whether he'll keep NCLB's schedule of testing kids in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. Also, will he retain some sort of federal focus on the bottom 5 percent of schools?

Kline also said he had hoped to introduce a bipartisan bill, with the support of Rep. George Miller of California, the top Democrat on the committee. But it doesn't look like that's going to happen. (More on that [here](#).)

The source of the conflict, according to Kline?

"Democrats are reluctant to let go of the power of the secretary of education," he said. "We do agree that the law needs to be changed and we'll go back from there."

Kline told Bennett it's unclear whether the House and Democratically-controlled Senate will ultimately be able to reach agreement on an NCLB overhaul. But he said, "it's worth continuing" the debate, in part because "the president has decided to take unilateral action" by "allowing Secretary Duncan to issue conditional waivers."

Lots of folks in Congress see the waivers as a power grab by the administration, while the White House is using the issue to push its "we acted because Congress couldn't" re-election strategy.

Quick recap on ESEA: The Senate education committee [passed](#) one bill with some bipartisan support, even though most Republicans on the committee were against it. The House education committee has passed two GOP-only bills, one dealing with [funding flexibility](#) and one [eliminating](#) programs. The full House has also approved one bipartisan piece of legislation, on [charter schools](#).

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Digital Learning Addresses Challenges in K-12 Ed.

Education Week

By: Katie Ash

January 4, 2012

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2012/01/digital_learning_addresses_cha.html

The Alliance for Excellent Education recently released a new brief called "[The Digital Learning Imperative: How Technology and Teaching Meet Today's Educational Challenges](#)," as a follow up to similar report issued [nearly two years ago](#).

The group and its founder, former gov. Bob Wise, are also partners with former gov. Jeb Bush and his Foundation for Excellence in education, with the two teaming up to launch the Digital Learning Now initiative in [the fall of 2010](#), an initiative aimed at getting states to pass policies more friendly to digital learning, but that some critics have alleged has ulterior commercial motives.

The update notes the latest developments in the ed-tech arena while acknowledging that challenges raised in the original report still affect today's teachers and learners. The report breaks those challenges into three categories:

1. Students are not leaving high school prepared for a global economy and fast-paced workplace. Only 72 percent of high schoolers graduate and many go into college needing remediation, the report says.
2. Schools are facing budget shortfalls and do not anticipate having new major funding sources in the near future. In fiscal year 2012, 42 states will be facing \$103 billion in budget gaps, the report says.
3. Not all students have access to high-quality teachers, teaching strategies, and learning experiences. Today's teachers, on average, have only 1-2 years of experience, down from an average of 15 years of experience in 1987. And many schools do not have access to teachers in specific subject areas, such as physics or chemistry, especially in rural areas, says the report.

Technology can help address these gaps and challenges, the report says, through real-time data and assessment feedback, a variety of online and digital content, and increased communication with teachers, parents, and students, teachers.

"As schools and districts explore the many opportunities that digital learning affords teachers and students, especially with today's global economy and demands for innovation, they see the potential for meeting the needs of increasingly diverse students more effectively," it reads.

And with technology enabling a greater variety of course offerings, students can take courses they find more compelling—and avoid the boredom many dropouts say is a reason they fail to graduate.

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Big Study Links Good Teachers to Lasting Gain

Washington Post

By: Annie Lowrey

January 6, 2012

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/education/big-study-links-good-teachers-to-lasting-gain.html?_r=2&ref=education

WASHINGTON — Elementary- and middle-school teachers who help raise their students' standardized-test scores seem to have a wide-ranging, lasting positive effect on those students' lives beyond academics, including lower teenage-pregnancy rates and greater college matriculation and adult earnings, according to a new study that tracked 2.5 million students over 20 years.

The paper, by [Raj Chetty](#) and [John N. Friedman](#) of Harvard and [Jonah E. Rockoff](#) of Columbia, all economists, examines a larger number of students over a longer period of time with more in-depth data than many earlier studies, allowing for a deeper look at how much the quality of individual teachers matters over the long term.

"That test scores help you get more education, and that more education has an earnings effect — that makes sense to a lot of people," said Robert H. Meyer, director of the [Value-Added Research Center](#) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which studies teacher measurement but was not involved in this study. "This study skips the stages, and shows differences in teachers mean differences in earnings."

The study, which the economics professors have presented to colleagues in more than a dozen seminars over the past year and plan to submit to a journal, is the largest look yet at the controversial "value-added ratings," which measure the impact individual teachers have on student test scores. It is likely to influence the roiling national debates about the importance of quality teachers and how best to measure that quality.

Many school districts, including those in Washington and Houston, have begun to use value-added metrics to influence decisions on hiring, pay and even firing.

Supporters argue that such metrics hold teachers accountable and can help improve the educational outcomes of millions of children. Detractors, most notably a number of teachers unions, say that isolating the effect of a given teacher is harder than it seems, and might unfairly penalize some instructors.

Critics particularly point to the high margin of error with many value-added ratings, noting that they tend to bounce around for a given teacher from year to year and class to class. But looking at an individual's value-added score for three or four classes, the researchers found that some consistently outperformed their peers.

"Everybody believes that teacher quality is very, very important," says Eric A. Hanushek, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford and longtime researcher of education policy. "What this paper and other work has shown is that it's probably more important than people think. That the variations or differences between really good and really bad teachers have lifelong impacts on children."

The average effect of one teacher on a single student is modest. All else equal, a student with one excellent teacher for one year between fourth and eighth grade would gain \$4,600 in lifetime income, compared to a student of similar demographics who has an average teacher. The student with the excellent teacher would also be 0.5 percent more likely to attend college.

Perhaps just as important, given the difficulty of finding, training and retaining outstanding teachers, is that the difference in long-term outcome between students who have average teachers and those with poor-performing ones is as significant as the difference between those who have excellent teachers and those with average ones, the study found.

In the aggregate, these differences are potentially enormous.

Replacing a poor teacher with an average one would raise a single classroom's lifetime earnings by about \$266,000, the economists estimate. Multiply that by a career's worth of classrooms.

"If you leave a low value-added teacher in your school for 10 years, rather than replacing him with an average teacher, you are hypothetically talking about \$2.5 million in lost income," said Professor Friedman, one of the coauthors.

To do the study, the researchers first tackled the question that has swirled controversy in so many school districts, including New York City's: whether value-added scores are in fact a good measure of teacher quality. Mr. Jones might regularly help raise test scores more than Ms. Smith, but maybe that is because his students are from wealthier families, or because he has a harder-working class — factors that can be difficult for researchers to discern.

While Professor Rockoff, at Columbia, has previously written favorably about value-added ratings, the Harvard pair were skeptics of the metrics. "We said, 'We're going to show that these measures don't work, that this has to do with student motivation or principal selection or something else,'" Professor Chetty recalled.

But controlling for numerous factors, including students' backgrounds, the researchers found that the value-added scores consistently identified some teachers as better than others, even if individual teachers' value-added scores varied from year to year.

After identifying excellent, average and poor teachers, the economists then set out to look at their students over the long term, analyzing information on earnings, college matriculation rates, the age they had children, and where they ended up living.

The results were striking. Looking only at test scores, previous studies had shown, the effect of a good teacher mostly fades after three or four years. But the broader view showed that the students still benefit for years to come.

Students with top teachers are less likely to become pregnant as teenagers, more likely to enroll in college, and more likely to earn more money as adults, the study found.

The authors argue that school districts should use value-added measures in evaluations, and to remove the lowest performers, despite the disruption and uncertainty involved.

"The message is to fire people sooner rather than later," Professor Friedman said.

Professor Chetty acknowledged, "Of course there are going to be mistakes — teachers who get fired who do not deserve to get fired." But he said that using value-added scores would lead to fewer mistakes, not more.

Still, translating value-added scores into policy is fraught with problems. Judging teachers by their students' test scores might encourage cheating, teaching to the test or lobbying to have certain students in class, for instance.

"We are performing these studies in settings where nobody cares about their ranking — it does not change their pay or job security," said Jesse Rothstein, an economist at the University of California, Berkeley, whose work criticizing other value-added assessments unions frequently cite. "But if you start to change that, there is going to be a range of responses."

Many other researchers and school administrators say that even if imperfect, well-calculated value-added scores are an important part of evaluating teachers.

"Very few people suggest that you should use value-added scores alone to make personnel decisions," Dr. Hanushek, of Stanford, said. "What the whole value-added debate has done is push forward the issue of how to evaluate teachers, and how to use that information."

The new study found no evidence for one piece of conventional wisdom: that having a good teacher in an early grade has a bigger effect than having a good teacher in later grades.

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STATE NEWS

Michigan virtual charters lag other public schools' performance, report says

Detroit Free Press

By: Lori Higgins

January 6, 2012

<http://www.freep.com/article/20120106/NEWS05/201060374/Virtual-charters-lag-other-public-schools-performance-report-says>

Virtual charter schools are one of the fastest-growing segments of the charter school industry, but a report released today raises questions about how well they educate students.

The report by the National Education Policy Center says 27% of for-profit companies operating virtual schools met the adequate yearly progress standards of the federal No Child Left Behind law. That compares with 48% of traditional brick-and-mortar charter schools and about half of all public schools nationwide. Charter schools are considered public schools.

The report comes as the Legislature considers a bill -- part of sweeping legislation that would give parents more choices for their children's education -- that would expand virtual charters in the state. State law enacted in 2010 allows only two to open and restricts enrollment to 400 in the first year. The bill -- passed in the Senate late last year and now before the [House](#) -- would remove those barriers.

Since the law was enacted, two virtual charters opened for the 2010-11 school year: Michigan Virtual Charter Academy and Michigan Connections Academy.

Standard called unfair

Today's report, titled "Profiles of For-Profit and Nonprofit Education Management," is a comprehensive look by Western Michigan

University researchers at the [performance](#) of education management organizations that run charter schools nationwide.

Lead researcher Gary Miron, an education professor at WMU, said it's unclear why so many virtual schools are not meeting the academic goals.

"These are not highly impoverished schools. ... These schools should be more likely to meet adequate yearly progress," he said.

The report was criticized by one of the leading providers of online education, [K12 Inc.](#)

K12 operates a number of virtual charters across the nation, including Michigan Virtual Charter Academy. Of the 39 virtual schools that K12 operates that received an AYP rating in 2010, 13 met the standards.

Jeff Kwitowski, spokesman for the company, based in Herndon, Va., said using the adequate yearly progress standard to judge virtual schools is unfair.

"It's not a reliable measure. The secretary of education has said that the AYP measure under (No Child Left Behind) is broken and unfairly labels schools as failing."

Stringent rules

Education Secretary Arne Duncan indeed has urged states to apply for waivers from some strict No Child rules that make it easy for a school to stumble, causing a number to be identified as failing.

In Michigan for instance, schools need 77%-88% of students to pass state math exams in order to meet the standards. But subgroups of students in those schools, including those living in poverty, minority groups, limited language students and special-education students, also must hit those goals. If one group doesn't make it, the whole school fails. Schools also can miss if they don't test at least 95% of students, and if they have attendance rates that fall below 90% and graduation rates that fall below 80%.

Kwitowski said that once students arrive in virtual schools, they show growth, and the longer they're enrolled, the better they perform.

He also noted that the National Education Policy Center is partially funded by the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union, which has been critical of some aspects of the charter school movement.

Similar conclusions

Connections Academy, based in Baltimore, operates the other virtual charter in Michigan -- Michigan Connections Academy. Nationwide, 27% of its virtual charters met the standards.

Neither of the Michigan virtual charters was open long enough to be in the study.

Miron acknowledged some of the concerns about using the adequate yearly progress measure. But he pointed to research in Pennsylvania that looked at individual student achievement data and came to similar conclusions about virtual schools.

And, he said, when there is such a wide gap between the percentage of virtual charters meeting the standard and other public schools, "that's pretty meaningful and significant."

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Idaho teachers fight a reliance on computers

New York Times News Service

By: Matt Richtel

January 5, 2012

<http://www.idahostatesman.com/2012/01/05/1940213/idaho-teachers-fight-a-reliance.html>

The change is part of a broader shift that's creating tension here and nationwide.

POST FALLS — Ann Rosenbaum, a former military police officer in the Marines, does not shrink from a fight, having even survived a close encounter with a car bomb in Iraq. Her latest conflict is quite different: She is now a high school teacher, and she and many of her peers in Idaho are resisting a statewide plan that dictates how computers should be used in classrooms.

The plan requires all high school students to take some online classes to graduate and that the students and their teachers be

given laptops or tablets. It also envisions a fundamental change in the role of teachers by making them less a lecturer at the front of the room and more of a guide helping students through lessons delivered on computers.

The tension caused by this change is especially visible in Idaho but is playing out across the country. Some teachers, even though they may embrace classroom technology, feel policymakers are thrusting computers into classrooms without their input or proper training. And some say they are opposed to shifting money to online classes and other teaching methods whose benefits remain unproven.

“Teachers don’t object to the use of technology,” said Sabrina Laine, vice president of the American Institutes for Research, which has studied the views of the nation’s teachers using grants from organizations like the Gates and Ford foundations. “They object to being given a resource with strings attached and without the needed support to use it effectively to improve student learning.”

In Idaho, many teachers have been actively opposed. They marched on the Capitol last spring, when the legislation was under consideration. They complain that lawmakers listened less to them than to heavy lobbying by technology companies, including Intel and Apple. Teacher and parent groups gathered 75,000 verified signatures, more than was needed, to put a referendum on the ballot next November that could overturn the law.

Doug StanWiens, 44, a popular teacher of advanced history and economics at Boise High School, is a heavy technology user. He relies on an interactive whiteboard and is working with his students to build a website that documents local architecture, a project he says will create a resource for the community.

“I firmly believe that technology is a tool for teachers to use,” he said. “It’s time for teachers to get moving on it.”

But he also spoke last year on the Capitol steps in opposition to the state’s program, which he said he saw as a poorly thought-out, one-size-fits-all approach.

Half of teachers, he suspects, will not use the new computers. And the online learning requirement seems to him to be a step toward cutting back on in-person teaching and, perhaps eventually, not having students congregate in schools at all.

“We can just get rid of sports and band and just give everyone a laptop and call it good,” he said.

“This technology is being thrown on us. It’s being thrown on parents and thrown on kids,” said Rosenbaum, 32, who has written letters to the governor and schools superintendent.

‘FIGHTING FOR MY KIDS’

In her letters, Rosenbaum says she is a Republican and a Marine, because, she says, it has become fashionable around the country to dismiss complaining teachers as union-happy liberals.

“I fought for my country,” she said. “Now I’m fighting for my kids.”

Gov. Butch Otter and Schools Superintendent Tom Luna, who have championed the plan, said teachers had been misled by their union into believing the changes were a step toward replacing them with computers. Luna said the teachers’ anger was intensified by other legislation, also passed last spring, that eliminated protections for teachers with seniority and replaced them with a pay-for-performance system.

Some teachers also have expressed concern that teaching positions could be eliminated and their raises reduced to help offset the cost of the technology.

Luna acknowledged that many teachers in the state were conservative Republicans like him — making Idaho’s politics less black-and-white than in states like Wisconsin and New Jersey, where union-backed teachers have been at odds with politicians.

Luna said he understood that technological change could be scary, particularly because teachers would need to adapt to new ways of working.

“The role of the teacher definitely does change in the 21st century. There’s no doubt,” Luna said. “The teacher does become the guide and the coach and the educator in the room helping students to move at their own pace.”

Luna said training was the most essential part of the plan. He said that millions of dollars would be set aside for this but that the details were still being worked out. Teachers will need to learn how to use the new devices and how to incorporate them into their lesson plans, which could involve rethinking longstanding routines.

Many details about how students would use their laptop or tablet are still being debated. But under the state’s plan, that teacher will not always be in the room. The plan requires high school students to take online courses for two of their 47 graduation credits.

Luna said this would allow students to take subjects that were not otherwise available at their schools and familiarize them with learning online, something he said was increasingly common in college.

The computer, he added, “becomes the textbook for every class, the research device, the advanced math calculator, the word processor and the portal to a world of information.”

Idaho is going beyond what other states have done in decreeing what hardware students and teachers should use and how they should use it. But such requirements are increasingly common at the district level, where most decisions about buying technology for schools are made.

Teachers are resisting, saying that they prefer to employ technology as it suits their own teaching methods and styles. Some feel they are judged on how much they make use of technology, regardless of whether it improves learning. Some teachers in the Los Angeles public schools, for example, complain that the form that supervisors use to evaluate teachers has a check box on whether they use technology, suggesting that they must use it for its own sake.

That is a concern shared by Rosenbaum, who teaches at Post Falls High School in northern Idaho. Rather than relying on technology, she seeks to engage students with questions — the Socratic method — as she did recently as she was taking her sophomore English class through “The Book Thief,” a novel about a family in Germany that hides a Jewish girl during World War II.

Rosenbaum, tall with an easy smile but also a commanding presence, stood in the center of the room with rows of desks on each side, pacing, peppering the students with questions and using each answer to prompt the next. What is an example of foreshadowing in this chapter? Why did the character say that? How would you feel in that situation?

TWO FLAGS, LITTLE TECHNOLOGY

Rosenbaum’s room mostly lacks high-tech amenities. Homework assignments are handwritten on whiteboards. Students write journal entries in spiral notebooks. On the walls are two American flags and posters paying tribute to the Marines, and on the ceiling a panel painted by a student thanks Rosenbaum for her service.

Rosenbaum did use a computer and projector to show a YouTube video of the devastation caused by bombing in World War II. She said that while technology had a role to play, her method of teaching was timeless. “I’m teaching them to think deeply, to think. A computer can’t do that.”

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Opinion: Look deeper than Florida schools' letters grades

St. Petersburg Times

By: Editorial Board

January 5, 2012

<http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/editorials/look-deeper-than-schools-letters-grades/1209325>

Florida's grades for public high schools are finally out this week and generating plenty of attention. But there is a lot more to school quality than the letter grade issued by the state. In this season of shopping for schools for the 2012-13 school year, parents and students would do well to look beyond the blunt instrument of a school's grade to more specific and meaningful indicators of achievement.

In fact, the school grade, particularly for high schools, may give a false sense of a school's actual success. Rather than relying on a school grade as a benchmark, it's far better to drill down into the actual numbers on graduation rates, FCAT and Advanced Placement test results and the like that make up the letter grade. Those are all available at the Florida Department of Education's website. In addition, because the rules are changing from year to year, the same performance by a school may well yield different grades last year, this year and next year.

The pitfall of looking just at grades is illustrated by the example of St. Petersburg's Gibbs High School. It has laudably risen from an F to B in three years because of myriad changes at the school that re-focused everyone on student achievement. Indeed, it would be easy for a casual observer to believe that a B school no longer has serious performance issues. Yet peel back a few layers of test results, and the raw statistics show that among non-magnet students last year at Gibbs, fewer than one in 10 were reading at or above grade level. That should remain cause for alarm and action, B school or no.

Pinellas superintendent John Stewart correctly perceives that the public puts great stock in school grades even as he understands that it is the various statistics behind the grade, not the grade itself, that really matter. To that end, he notes the need to improve stagnant high school reading scores, which actually are a measure of student achievement. Get students reading earlier and more proficiently, and the letter grades are more likely to take care of themselves.

For better or worse, Florida has adopted the simplistic shorthand of school letter grades to draw attention to student performance. But parents and students should keep those grades in perspective. There are other more specific measures that reveal far more about how well each school is educating its students.

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