

From: [Sarah Powell \(Sarah@afloridapromise.org\) <sarah@afloridapromise.org>](mailto:Sarah.Powell@afloridapromise.org)
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NATIONAL NEWS

Broad Foundation Announces New Prize for Urban Charters

Education Week

By: Christina Samuels

October 31, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2011/10/broad_foundation_announces_priz.html

The Los Angeles-based Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, which has sponsored a prize for the [top urban public school districts](#) for the past 10 years, is starting a similar award program for the nation's charter schools.

The [Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools](#) will provide \$250,000 to the charter management organization that demonstrates the best academic outcomes for traditionally disadvantaged students, including closing achievement gaps.

Only certain charter management organizations will be eligible for the prize, because the foundation is focusing on systems of schools that have a long enough track record for judges to evaluate. For the first year, eligible charter management organizations must have:

- five or more charter schools in operation as of the 2007-08 school year;
- 1,500 students or more enrolled each year since 2007-08;
- at least 40 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches since 2008-09;
- 40 percent or more students from minority groups since 2008-09;
- and 75 percent of its schools located in urban areas.

Right now, [20 charter management organizations meet that criteria](#), including the KIPP Foundation, YES Prep Public Schools in Texas, and Green Dot Public Schools, which operates schools in Los Angeles.

Unlike the Broad Prize for school districts, which evaluates systems on quantitative as well as qualitative measures, the new charter school prize winner will be selected based on student achievement data only.

Some of the same [panelists](#) who have worked with the urban school district prize will be lending their expertise to the new charter school award, including Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute (and an [Edweek.org blogger](#)) and Eric Hanushek, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University.

Also on the panel is Christopher B. Swanson, the vice president of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit corporation that publishes *Education Week*.

After a winner is selected, a Broad Prize team will visit the schools to develop a report on that organization's best practices. The winning CMO can use the prize money for "college-readiness efforts for low-income students, such as scholarships, speaker series, or campus visits," the foundation said in a press release.

Ursula Wright, the interim president and chief executive officer of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools in Washington, said Monday that no comparable prize for charter management organization currently exists. The prize "is a great way to endorse what is really working in the charter sector," she said.

The announcement of the first winner will be made in June at the alliance's conference in Minneapolis. The conference will also be honoring the anniversary of [City Academy](#), the nation's first charter school, which was formed 20 years ago in St. Paul, Minn.

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Billions Donates \$18M to Andre Agassi's Charter School

Education Week

By: Bryan Toporek

October 31, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/schooled_in_sports/2011/10/billionaire_donates_18m_to_andre_agassis_charter_school.html

Billionaire Kirk Kerkorian, the former owner of MGM studios, is donating \$18 million to the Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy in Las Vegas, Agassi [announced](#) over the weekend.

Kerkorian's gift marks the largest donation in the 16-year history of the [Andre Agassi Foundation for Education](#), which has raised over \$150 million in total.

The Foundation for Education sends funding to [Agassi Prep](#), which has sent every one of its graduates for the past three years to college. The school is located in an "at-risk neighborhood in the urban core of Las Vegas," according to the [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#).

Agassi made the announcement at his foundation's 16th Grand Slam for Children Benefit Concert in Las Vegas. Including Kerkorian's \$18 million donation, another \$1.5 million donation from the Engelstad Family Foundation and \$1 million from Windsong Trust (plus ticket sales and auction proceeds), the foundation raised an estimated \$26.1 million that night.

"I am both astounded and humbled by the generosity and compassion of our community, the artists, sponsors, partners, and donors," Agassi said in a statement. "This record-breaking evening will make a positive difference in students' lives as we continue to work to transform education."

Agassi said that Kerkorian's donation helped the foundation reach its goal of guaranteeing that Agassi Prep has enough funding to continue in perpetuity.

Kerkorian has long been a family friend of Agassi, and even "put bread" on Agassi's family's table when his father worked at the original MGM Hotel, Agassi said at last year's Grand Slam for Children benefit, according to the *Review-Journal*.

Last week, Agassi [spoke](#) with the *Las Vegas Sun* about his educational mission and where the motivation came from:

"I think the moment that I really took on the Herculean task of building a K-12 charter school in the most economic-challenged area of Las Vegas was when I was at my lowest point, quite ironically. I was stuck at No. 140 in the world after being No. 1 in the world and very disconnected with my life, in a life I just didn't recognize anymore. You read all about that depression and anguish in my book.

"The only thing that made sense to me, of choosing going nowhere or taking ownership of my life, was to use my tennis for something that really resonated with me, and that was impacting children. And the greatest way to do that was through education, so that's when I said I'm going to build my school, and I'm going to use that vehicle as the one thing that gets me to connect with this very sport that I spent, unfortunately, too long in my life not loving."

Earlier this year, Agassi [teamed up](#) with a group of Los Angeles bankers to create a for-profit investment fund aimed at raising \$750 million for the construction of 75 charter schools over the next few years.

Agassi isn't the only professional sports icon who's wading into the charter school waters.

Back in September, the Texas board of education [approved](#) the charter school bid of former Dallas Cowboys cornerback Deion Sanders.

Assuming all goes according to plan, Sanders will open two campuses of PrimeU Prep Academy next year—one in Fort Worth and another in Dallas.

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STATE NEWS

National Assessment of Educational Progress results for reading, math

coming Tuesday (scores for FL and nation)

Orlando Sentinel

By: Leslie Postal

October 31, 2011

http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/news_education_edblog/2011/10/naep-results-for-reading-math-coming-tuesday-scores-for-fl-and-nation.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+SentinelSchoolZone+%28Sentinel+School+Zone%29

The tests results often called the “Nation’s Report Card” are due out tomorrow, showing how students nationwide did on math and reading exams given earlier this year.

The release will include data for Florida and the other states. Florida educators pay close attention to [NAEP — the National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) — because it is a chance to see how state students do compared to their public school peers across the country.

It was a big deal, for example, in 2003 when Florida’s fourth-graders, for the first time ever, beat the national average on the NAEP reading test. NAEP performance is part of how Florida will gauge its success under Race to the Top. And when devising its new FCAT scoring system, the state looked at 8th-graders performance on NAEP – which was at the national average — and used that as a benchmark to help set new state standards.

The NAEP exams are given only to a sampling of students, so there are no district or school scores (and no individual student reports). But they aim to give a statistically accurate snapshot of how the country’s youngsters are doing in key academic subjects.

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Los Angeles United School District faces suit linking teacher ratings to student performance

Los Angeles Times

By: Howard Blume

October 31, 2011

http://www.latimes.com/news/local/education/la-me-teacher-evs-20111101.0.4602622.full_story

A group of parents and education advocates is preparing to sue the Los Angeles school district, demanding that it follow an arcane 40-year-old law that requires all California school systems to link teacher and principal evaluations to student performance.

The law, known as the Stull Act, was passed in 1971 with bipartisan support although neither school district officials nor teachers unions ever pushed to enforce all of its provisions, with their potential for conflict.

Now, with L.A. schools Supt. John Deasy locked in a stalemate with the teachers union over performance reviews, a prominent group of advocates believes it can force the issue with a lawsuit, which is expected to be filed Tuesday.

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New Mexico: Educators question rules for grading schools A-F

Associated Press

By: Barry Massey

October 31, 2011

<http://www.abqjournal.com/main/2011/10/31/abqnewsseeker/educators-question-rules-for-grading-schools-a-f.html>

Educators on Monday cautioned Gov. Susana Martinez’s administration against rushing the implementation of a new law requiring the state to assign grades to rate the performance of public schools.

Teachers, superintendents and others raised questions about the grading system at a hearing by the Public Education Department on proposed rules for evaluating schools.

Gloria Rendon of the New Mexico Coalition of School Administrators suggested a pilot program that would initially use the system in a few schools to help work out potential problems in how grades will be determined. Schools, she said, “need the general public to recognize that kids are more than test scores and schools are more than just a grade.”

The A-to-F grading system will be based heavily on standardized tests taken by students and on growth of student performance in reading and mathematics. Other factors include elementary school attendance, high school graduation rate and a survey of students.

“This is not a survey to students saying, ‘Do you like your teacher?’ This is asking, ‘What’s happening in the classroom?’” said

Public Education Secretary Hanna Skandera.

Student participation in extracurricular activities and parental involvement also will be factors in determining a school's grade.

Skandera said the administration will ask the federal government to allow New Mexico to use the new grading plan next year instead of a federally mandated system for rating schools.

Nearly 87 percent of New Mexico schools missed the latest targets for boosting student achievement and failed this year to make "adequate yearly progress" under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"I don't believe that. I believe there are lots of things happening in our schools that we are not capturing and need to," said Skandera.

The department planned to give schools a preliminary grade by the end of this year to help districts understand how the new system will work, according to an agency spokesman.

Comments from the hearing will be considered by the department in developing final rules for the grading program. Another hearing is scheduled Wednesday in Alamogordo.

Representatives of superintendents and school boards said the administration's proposal gives too much authority to the department over spending decisions of districts with schools graded D or F. Districts will be required to implement programs recommended by the department for improving student performance.

"We feel that decisions regarding budgets and instructional expenditures in curriculum really are best left to local control," said Rendon.

Sen. Vernon Asbill, a Carlsbad Republican and former superintendent who sponsored the grading system legislation enacted this year, said school administrators want to make sure the department "is taking the time to implement this so we don't make mistakes that we have to dig ourselves out of at some future date."

Asbill also said the state must adequately finance public schools. The new grading system is based on a program in Florida, which he said hired thousands of additional reading teachers to help struggling students.

Larry Langley of the New Mexico Business Roundtable urged the department to implement the grading system quickly because it will help businesses assess the quality of schools as they consider whether to move operations to New Mexico.

"We believe this system ... has so much more merit in talking to companies. It has so much more merit in actually showing a snapshot of what's going on in our schools and how our schools are really doing," said Langley.

But teachers and others said it's unclear that the department's plan for evaluating schools will adequately deal with factors that districts can't control, such as a school's demographics and whether it has a disproportionate share of minority students, those learning to speak English and children from families living in poverty.

Lisa O'Riley, an elementary school fine arts teacher in Albuquerque, said schools face difficulties because many children lack parental support at home.

"Please don't just be politicians. Please be children's advocates," O'Riley told department officials.

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Merit pay for schools may make the grade in New Jersey

Associated Press

By: Staff

October 31, 2011

<http://www.nj.com/newsflash/index.ssf/story/merit-pay-for-schools-may-make-the/2e4d2973290644d895b236fe42f3f256>

The leader of the New Jersey Senate said he won't stand in the way of a bill introducing merit pay into classrooms, so long as it singles out schools, not individual teachers, for achievement.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney told The Associated Press a merit pay bill that rewards schools for exceeding educational expectations could be debated before the Legislature recesses for the winter holidays.

However, the South Jersey Democrat said he won't consider a merit pay proposal for teachers because of the politics involved in giving individuals bonuses. Similarly, he said a bill removing seniority protections for veteran teachers wouldn't be considered.

Sweeney controls which bills get posted for discussion and votes in the Senate.

"Recognizing a school for excellence makes sense to me because it's going to make their jobs easier," he said last week.

Steve Wollmer, a spokesman for the New Jersey Education Association, said the teachers union remains opposed to the concept of merit pay, but finds rewarding schools less problematic than compensating individual teachers for achievement.

"We agreed if you were really duty-bound to reward a school, do it for the school, don't pit teacher against teacher," he said.

Gov. Chris Christie is expected to press the Legislature to act on a series of changes to public education when it convenes after the Nov. 8 election. Christie's proposals include eliminating lifetime teacher tenure and seniority protections, tying teacher evaluations to student achievement and establishing a system of merit pay.

"I can push too," Sweeney said when asked about the pressure the Republican governor is expected to exert.

Many of the Republican governor's proposals require approval from the Democratic Legislature.

Sweeney said he would also consider allowing a discussion on revisions to teacher tenure, but said he would rely on Sen. Teresa Ruiz of Newark, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, to provide details.

The public teachers union, the New Jersey Education Association, disagrees with many of the administration's proposals but recently recognized the need to come to the table with its own suggestions for change.

For example, NJEA Executive Director Vince Giordano last week said the union would support extending to four years the length of time for a teacher to receive tenure, provided that the first year would be one of intense supervision and mentorship like a medical internship.

The proposal is similar to a bill drafted by Ruiz, which calls for adding a fourth year before tenure is granted. Ruiz's proposal preserves seniority protections for teachers but gives school principals more authority over teachers working in their schools.

Currently, it takes three years for a New Jersey public school teacher to achieve tenure.

The union also has emphasized the challenge of evaluating teachers fairly.

It opposes using tests that measure student progress but don't consider classroom dynamics or outside influences, such as neighborhood factors, parental involvement and economics, as major criteria.

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Opinion: Tennessee: Grading teachers vital to education

Knoxville News Sentinel

By: Mike Edwards

October 29, 2011

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/oct/29/grading-teachers-vital-to-education/>

Every student needs to be well prepared for life and the work force. Studies show that students with good educations get better jobs, are happier and live longer. Multiple studies by William Sanders, the father of value-added educational research, have shown that teachers are the most important factor in a child's education. A great teacher can have tremendous influence on students' ability to learn, and an unskilled teacher can be something from which a student never recovers.

Great teachers are more important than ever. In the coming weeks the Tennessee Department of Education will release reports that compare student performance on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program tests with performance on the more rigorous National Assessment of Educational Progress exams. The NAEP is the national standard for student performance. Early indications are that Tennessee students' aggregate scores will be very poor. Excellent, professional educators will be the single most important factor in improving student learning.

Tennessee recognizes the importance of high-quality teachers and has implemented a system of meaningful annual teacher evaluations based on verifiable data. This is not a punitive measure but rather intended to help teachers and principals improve.

In the private workplace, employee evaluations are a common practice. Companies regularly set clear, measurable expectations and then evaluate workers' performance against those goals. These measurements help businesses reward, encourage and train employees so that the company sees increasing profits and the employee experiences a more rewarding career. The employees who do not perform to expectations and do not respond to professional development are often encouraged to find other, more personally rewarding career options. In business the main metric is profit; in education it is and ought to be student performance. Tennessee's teacher evaluation program, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model, aims to help teachers and principals understand how they are performing and how to grow in the teaching profession. For those for whom teaching may not have been the best career choice, TEAM allows for a clear, objective method to help make personal decisions regarding their future. The notion of teacher and principal evaluations has a number in the profession rattled. Through their professional organizations, such as the Tennessee Education Association and Knox County Education Association, a vocal minority is aggressively making its opposition to the TEAM evaluations known to members of the Tennessee General Assembly.

Gov. Bill Haslam's administration strongly supports teacher evaluations. In fact, the administration, the state Legislature, every school board and the TEA committed to support an evaluation system as a part of the \$500 million Race to the Top grant

Tennessee received in 2010.

The concern is that the opposition to teacher and principal evaluations will sway the Legislature to repeal or water down the teacher evaluation law. I served on the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee that recommended the TEAM evaluation system to the state school board. The system is good and will improve as it is used, weaknesses are identified and corrections are made. Challenges with implementation exist and need to be resolved, but we should be working together to try to improve these processes rather than fighting about whether we should have meaningful evaluations. To allow those who do not want meaningful, frequent evaluations to succeed in convincing the Legislature to gut the law would greatly hinder getting Tennessee students ready for life. Please contact your elected officials today and support Tennessee's Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model evaluation system.

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Florida: New VPK rules toughen standards

Tampa Tribune

By: Michele Sager

November 1, 2011

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/education-news/2011/nov/01/new-vpk-rules-toughen-standards-ar-299524/>

Rule changes for the state's Voluntary Prekindergarten program are meant to ensure all students get the same education, regardless of where they go to school, but some providers say the new standards would judge them unfairly.

Last month, the Florida Board of Education approved a proposal for new learning standards for the free preschool program, paid for by the state. The program allows all 4-year-olds in Florida to attend preschool at no cost.

State leaders pushed for guidelines that clearly spell out curriculum expectations for VPK students and that are consistent with other state preschool programs.

"These guidelines put VPK standards in line with our other programs and make it clearer for parents," said Stewart Greenberg, executive director of the state's early learning programs.

Right now, schools can design their own curricula; but under the proposed rules, which still need final approval in December, the state would stipulate what VPK providers are expected to teach.

The standards center around five areas of development: physical, cognitive, social and how children communicate and approach school lessons.

Students would be required to pass two observation exams: an oral exam showing they understand words and a letter-recognition test. Providers who don't have at least 70 percent of their students pass would be deemed low-performing, and those rated as low-performing two years in a row can lose their state funding.

Now, providers are scored on a scale of 0 to 200, and centers rated below 140 are judged to be low-performing. Scores are based on how students perform on readiness tests given in the first 30 days of kindergarten.

That benchmark score was determined by the state so that about 15 percent of the bottom-scoring providers would receive the low-performing label. Under the proposed rules, scores would be based on how many students pass the observation tests. More schools are expected to be at risk for being judged low-performing.

This year, about 10 percent of Hillsborough County's 426 VPK programs were considered low-performing. About 12 percent of the state's 6,000 or so programs ranked as low performers.

Many providers, though, say the rankings are flawed and that the "low-performing" label is unfair.

Anita Maurer, the preschool director for Sydney's School for Autism in Tampa, said programs such as hers would have a hard time measuring up under the new standards. Her school scored a 188 this year but was on the low-performing list last year with a score of 114.

"We serve children with challenges who are less likely to be at the level as everyone else," she said.

To account for those disparities, the state grants exemptions to programs where a certain percentage of students have special needs, Greenberg said.

Even still, Maurer fears the new standards will encourage more providers to turn away children with special needs and only serve children that will hit the benchmarks when entering kindergarten.

Dave McGerald, the chief executive officer for Hillsborough County's Early Learning Coalition, said the state's accountability system makes no sense.

"A one-time exam isn't a true reflection of a program," he said. "It would make more sense to give students a pre-evaluation

when entering the program and then a second one to see the progress of the student," he said.

State leaders held a series of public meetings with schools across Florida, taking input on the changes. Greenberg said his department is committed to providing resources so providers understand the guidelines and can implement them.

"We are in this with them," he said. "We are actively engaged with our providers and want to see all of them succeed."

The Florida Board of Education will consider the input from the public and approve a final set of guidelines at its December meeting.

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