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NATIONAL NEWS

Blended Learning on the Rise, Report Says

Education Week

By: Katie Ash

November 9, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2011/11/blended_learning_on_the_rise_r.html

The eighth annual [Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning](#), released today at the Virtual School Symposium in Indianapolis, finds that single-district online programs—many of which include blended learning—are the fastest-growing segment of online education this year. (Single-district online programs are created by a district for the students in that district only.)

Another area of growth is consortium programs, which usually involve several districts banding together to pool resources and share expertise. Part of the reason for this is the decrease in state funding available for state-level virtual education opportunities, the report says.

The report notes that state virtual schools are also splitting into two categories—those with sustainable funding models that are making a significant impact on learning, and those that are not receiving reliable support from states. State virtual schools accounted for 536,000 course enrollments for the 2010-11 school year, an increase of 19 percent over the previous year.

Other factors, such as the Common Core state standards as well as the frequent mergers of private online education providers, have significantly affected the landscape of online education in the U.S., the report says. In addition, several states have passed laws that will affect the way that virtual education operates in those states, the report notes.

This year marks a shift in the way that educators are thinking about online learning, the report states. Those wishing to be innovative are steering away from 'traditional' virtual school models of fully online virtual education and instead opting for blended learning or other methods instead. Says the report:

A tangible sense exists in many states that there is no need for a state virtual school; that pioneering states and educators should instead look for the next thing. Certainly further innovation is a worthy goal, but this view leaves behind the students in nearly all states who do not have widespread access to online options.

The *Keeping Pace* report also includes state profiles of virtual learning initiatives, definitions of online learning terms, as well as an entire section that defines and explains blended learning. There is also a breakdown of key policy issues, such as funding, demographics of online students, accreditation, pre-service online teacher training, and online learning graduation requirements.

Clearly, there is a lot to absorb in this year's report, which can be downloaded for free from the [Keeping Pace website](#).

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ESEA Amendment Would Alter Teacher-Quality Allocations

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

November 9, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/11/esea_amendment_would_alter_tea.html

A little-noticed amendment that the Senate Education Committee approved in its recent ESEA bill stands to have a major impact on how teacher-quality funds are distributed among states.

Bear with me, there's some wonky background here before we get to the juicy stuff. Every state and something like 90-odd percent of districts receive allocations through the federal Title II state teacher-quality grant program. It's a popular fund because states and districts can do practically whatever they want with it as long as it's teacher-quality related.

Formula grants like this one tend to have "hold harmless" provisions whereby every state is guaranteed a base allocation. Title II is no exception; no state gets less than they got under the two programs that preceded its creation in 2001. Additional funds are allocated by child poverty rates and population in the states.

The problem? Title II has been cut by about \$400 million over the past few years, so the hold-harmless allotment makes up an increasing portion of the overall state allocations. Clearly, this disadvantages states that have grown in population or have increasingly high incidence of child poverty.

So, during the committee-amendment process, Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., introduced an amendment to yank out this language from the Harkin-Enzi reauthorization bill. It passed fairly comfortably.

(Small and less-populous states and territories would still get a minimum allocation under the change. Wipe away your tears, Sen. Enzi!)

Most states wouldn't see drastically different allocations, but removing the hold harmless does create some notable winners and losers. Here's a rundown of those states that stand to **gain or lose \$10 million or more** under the proposed change:

WINNERS: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina (surprise!), Texas.

LOSERS: Louisiana, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania.

So far, this amendment doesn't seem to have garnered much attention. But you can bet your bottom dollar lawmakers from those less-favored states will be fixin' to get mad if this bill moves closer to passage.

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Opinion: Forstmann's Not So Little Idea

The Wall Street Journal

By: Daniel Henninger

November 10, 2011

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204358004577028050352513254.html>

What is the single most frustrating issue in American politics? The deficit? Nah. Entitlement reform? A cakewalk. The Republican Party's presidential nominee? A day in the park. It's this: Reforming the nation's failing inner-city schools. When in 1999 Ted Forstmann started the Children's Scholarship Fund with John Walton, he thought it was a good idea that might last about four years. The short version of the good idea was that CSF would raise private funds to give scholarships to inner-city students, whose parents also would contribute money toward tuition at a private school of their choice. The notion was that CSF would offer a helping hand until larger reforms emerged to repair an obviously failing public education system. The fund attracted a lot of attention then because Ted Forstmann, a founder of the Forstmann, Little & Co. leveraged-buyout firm, and John Walton, whose father was Sam Walton, between them put \$100 million behind the effort and raised another \$100 million. For those who've been in the trenches of education reform, what happened next has entered the realm of legend. An almost incomprehensible 1.25 million families from some 22,000 U.S. cities and towns applied for the four-year scholarships. In New York City, 168,000 applied (about 30% of those eligible) for 2,500 scholarships. Nor were they seeking a free ride. The scholarships were typically for less than \$2,000 a year, with the parents expected to pitch in perhaps half of that. On announcement day, the fund awarded 40,000 scholarships. And Ted Forstmann took the occasion to say in public what he wanted to say about the state of education in the United States, circa 1999: "Some insist that if we would just keep doing more of what we have been doing—spend more money, hire more teachers and reduce class sizes—we will get different results. I don't believe that anymore."

He said one more thing that day worth recalling. It was about the \$1,000 or so each scholarship family was kicking in: "Consider that \$1,000 over four years from the parents of 1.25 million children adds up to \$5 billion. Five billion dollars from families who have very little. Five billion in scrimping and savings, in second jobs and second-hand clothes, in basic necessities not bought, and countless other sacrifices made—simply to escape the system that they've been relegated to and to obtain a decent education for their children."

Mr. Forstmann thought the failure of the education status quo was so obvious and the need for change so dire (he called it "an appeal to the moral middle of America") that change of some sort would come soon to American public education. Needless to say, he was wrong. Change did not come to public, inner-city education. The teachers unions won't allow it, and the pols in the party they support value incumbency's power more than anyone's notion of a moral crisis.

Messrs. Forstmann and Walton persisted with their notion of reform. There's an old saw about commitment that I like, especially when money is on the line: in for a nickel, in for a dime. To date, the Children's Scholarship Fund has raised \$483 million. It has

disbursed scholarships to 123,000 students. It has affiliate programs in 33 states, which now administer the program on their own.

The imperative to be current requires that we interrupt this rare, good-news story to admit unsavory political issues. It has become difficult not to notice that the current American president is never so energized as when he is traveling the land denouncing "millionaires and billionaires." We are instructed to believe that the 1% are pillaging the 99%. Which is to say we are going to get a presidential election rooted in well-fertilized animosities of class and party. By contrast, Messrs. Forstmann and Walton (who died in 2005) concluded back then that percentage and party could be put to more productive use.

After raising the ante on school reform with their own \$100 million for the scholarships, the two men recruited a bipartisan array of backers, such as Democrats Andrew Young, Eli Broad, Pat Moynihan, Tom Daschle, John Breaux, Ron Burkle and Floyd Flake; and Republicans Trent Lott, Henry Kissinger, Julian Robertson, George Shultz and Roger Staubach. Mr. Forstmann's current vice-chair for the fund is Mike McCurry, a former press secretary for President Bill Clinton. Measure this political alliance against the enormous difficulty the past three years of getting Congress to reinstate the Washington, D.C., Opportunity Scholarship Program. It did so in April.

Bipartisan philanthropy is of course traditional in the U.S., where more than \$200 billion is given annually by individuals to keep cultural, educational and medical institutions operating. This is a world of grown-ups, and no doubt the tradition of bipartisan support will continue, no matter how much vilification is unloaded on them in the next 12 months.

Mr. Forstmann has long argued that all the money dumped into public education budgets misses the element most crucial to the schools' success: active parental involvement. His solution to getting them in the game has been requiring the parents to contribute between 25% and 75% of the scholarship award, based on need. That's it. The parents can pick any private school they desire. Many go straight to neighborhood parochial schools, once the sturdy adjunct to many urban public systems. Asked how they assure the quality of the choices, Scholarship Fund President Darla Romfo says, "We don't decide what is a good school; they do." And if they don't like that school, they're free to switch the scholarship to another.

This is the point at which the obligatory "outcomes" data is normally inserted. At first CSF didn't try to measure results because they didn't expect to be in business this long. They do have strong evaluation results now, but here's an editorial comment: If the choice is between strong parental involvement and nearly no parental involvement, the data in favor of involved parents came in about 200,000 years ago.

Some time back, in an essay on the entrepreneur's social role, Mr. Forstmann wrote, "He inhabits a world where belief precedes results." For years, no more frustrating belief has existed in American domestic politics than the possibility of giving inner-city children a better education. Against the public-school monopoly, sustained forward movement has seemed impossible. That may be changing. This year at least 13 states passed some form of school-choice legislation. Notably, Indiana's new voucher program is letting parents use public funds this fall to send their children to private, mostly religious, schools.

We live in bitter and divided political times, with optimism in short supply. It is somehow fitting that an idea Ted Forstmann and John Walton put in motion 12 years ago just had a breakout year. Sometimes, belief really does produce results.

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STATE NEWS

New Jersey's education chief voids teacher contract

Associated Press

By: Staff

November 10, 2011

<http://www.nj.com/newsflash/index.ssf/story/njs-education-chief-voids-teacher-contract/8c16a8be958e4045b10671b3dc05e7ba>

New Jersey's acting education commissioner has voided a teacher contract in a ruling that could have implications statewide.

Chris Cerf found the deal between teachers and the Ramsey school board exceeded a three-year limit on contracts. The pact included a retroactive payment that covered two years and another agreement for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years.

Cerf said the 2010-11 pact violated the rule that prevents committing future school boards to salary terms.

New Jersey School Boards Association spokesman Frank Belluscio told The Record newspaper (<http://bit.ly/uvbtuf>) there are at least four districts that have adopted multiple contracts spanning more than three years.

Ramsey teachers plan to appeal.

It's not clear how the 4.35 percent pay raises they received last year would factor into new contract talks.

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Ohio Republican legislators have an SB 5 rewrite to do: Kevin O'Brien

The Plain Dealer

By: Kevin O'Brien

November 10, 2011

http://www.cleveland.com/obrien/index.ssf/2011/11/ohio_republican_legislators_ha.html

Ohio awoke Wednesday morning to a different political landscape. The fiscal problems in state and local governments were all in their usual places. But overnight, the solutions enacted in the spring had disappeared.

Voters mired knee-deep in a fiscal swamp imagined themselves striding confidently toward sunlit uplands of prosperity -- and voted accordingly.

From Tuesday's [failure of Issue 2](#), resulting in the repeal of the collective bargaining reforms of Senate Bill 5, Ohioans learned two important lessons about themselves:

- They love their firefighters and police officers, which is fine.

- A lot of them think money is "out there" somewhere to spare state and local government programs and services from significant cuts, which is pure fantasy.

So, now what?

Awaiting the inevitable -- the eventual collapse of the current system under the weight of national debt, an economy choked by government size and regulatory hyperactivity, and taxpayers who will someday call a halt to the looting of their bank accounts by "public servants" -- remains an option, of course. But it's the most needlessly painful, most chaotic, least responsible option.

Ohio can still do better, and its elected representatives should not waste a moment before bending to the task.

Something very much like [Senate Bill 5](#) should be introduced in the General Assembly right away. The sole difference should be its exclusion of safety unions -- the [Wisconsin approach](#).

The legislation to roll back union power over that state's local governments never included police officers and firefighters. Instead, it focused on the biggest, richest, most powerful and least sympathetic of public unions: the teachers.

That could work here, too.

On Tuesday, even as Ohio voters patted their public employees on the back with one hand, most held tight to their money with the other. School levies asking for new dollars [didn't do well](#) statewide.

Why not?

Because Ohio voters, especially in school districts where residents' average income level isn't stratospheric, don't like to surrender to the teachers unions' demands until they're absolutely, positively sure there's no alternative.

No other union can focus and wield power like the teachers.

When teachers unions say "jump" and the voters don't immediately respond "how high?" the public feels the wrath immediately and directly. Sports get canceled. Bus routes get dropped. Worst case, schools get closed while teachers parade out front with placards. For the children, of course.

In the end, the public knuckles under because it runs out of options.

Power plays like that leave a sour enough taste to invite change, so that's a good place for legislators to start over.

What would make no sense at all would be for the Republicans of Capitol Square to sit still and do nothing.

They crossed the Rubicon when they passed SB 5. They're committed, regrets or not. No matter what they do from now on, they'll be targets of a maximum effort to throw them out next November -- especially now that the Democrats have won the battle to keep open the sluice gates through which money flows from taxpayers to public employees to the party's coffers.

Republicans gain nothing by pulling in their horns now.

And speaking of pulling in horns, any analysis of Tuesday's vote would be remiss if it did not mention the cowardly behavior of a host of mayors and school board members across Ohio who know precisely how dire are the fiscal situations of their jurisdictions and their constituencies, and yet remained silent about the necessity of passing Issue 2.

To hide out during one of the most important, most contentious debates in Ohio's recent history -- a debate with enormous consequences for every locality -- is the very height of irresponsibility.

Anyone who doubts the power of public unions over local politics need only consider how many local elected officials were absent from the Issue 2 battlefield for fear of union retribution.

"I have to work with those people," comes the plaintive excuse.

What about the people you're supposed to work *for*?

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Colorado Moving Ahead With 4-Tier Teacher Ratings

Associated Press

By: Staff

November 9, 2011

<http://denver.cbslocal.com/2011/11/09/colorado-moving-ahead-with-4-tier-teacher-ratings/>

Colorado education officials have finished work on teacher rating system that could make it easier to fire teachers who don't meet testing standards.

The Board of Education unanimously approved the system Wednesday. The standards in the works for months create a four-tier grading system for teachers and principals. The grades are "highly effective," "effective," "partially effective" and "ineffective."

Educators rated "ineffective" for two consecutive years would lose tenure. New teachers would need three consecutive years of "effective" ratings to make tenure.

The standards won't be in place for many just yet. They will be tested at pilot schools, and state lawmakers have to sign off next year.

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