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NATIONAL NEWS

Narrow Iowa Winner Romney Has Long Education Record

Education Week

By: Alyson Klein

January 4, 2011

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

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney won the Iowa caucus by the thinnest of margins, edging out former Pennsylvania U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum by just eight votes, according to [published reports](#). U.S. Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, a longtime critic of the federal role in education who has said he wants to scrap the federal student lending program, placed a close third.

Romney has a long record and a lot of ideas on education redesign. He's a fan of [standardized testing](#), and has credited the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 with providing a much-needed boost to accountability. In fact, he was one of the NCLB law's biggest champions when he ran for president back in 2008. But this year, he has also emphasized the need to step up the state role when it comes to K-12.

He's also [complimented](#) President Barack Obama's signature education reform program—Race to the Top—saying the program "had done some good things."

Romney [devoted](#) an entire chapter to education in a book published in March of 2010. In it, he called for getting rid of teacher salary schedules, but said he'd like to pay beginning teachers more. He also waded into the culture wars, saying he thinks students should be taught about the advantages of marriage.

Santorum had [said](#) during debates last year that he doesn't think schools serve "the customer," meaning parents. He said he thinks that has to change, but he didn't say exactly how he'd make that happen. And, during consideration of the NCLB law, he pushed in the Senate for [language](#) encouraging schools to teach about the controversy behind evolution.

Back in 2004, Santorum [withdrew](#) his children from a Pennsylvania cyber charter school after critics in the Keystone State questioned whether he could educate them at state taxpayers' expense when his family lives most of the year in a Washington suburb.

In other Iowa caucus developments, Texas governor Rick Perry, who has [clashed](#) with the administration on federal stimulus funding, Race to the Top, and common state standards, finished with just 10 percent of the vote. He's considering whether there he still has a "path forward" in the race, according to published reports.

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States Expected to Focus on 3rd-Grade Retention

Education Week
By: Sean Cavanagh
January 4, 2012

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2012/01/post_14.html

Elected officials in a couple of states are expected to take on one of the trickiest issues affecting elementary schools: how high to set the bar for allowing students to move between grades 3 and 4.

Governors in Iowa and New Mexico have proposed setting a reading skill level for students to advance beyond 3rd grade, an idea they hope their legislatures will take up as they convene this winter.

It's a proposal that a [number of states](#) have shown an interest in recently, though it's also a controversial one. Critics say flunking 3rd graders risks derailing their education at a young age; but supporters say the policies are needed to prevent students from simply being shuffled on to the next grade without regard for whether they're ready for the work—a practice they label "social promotion."

Many state officials have credited former [Florida Gov. Jeb Bush](#), who placed an emphasis on building students' early reading skills, with having pioneered the concept.

Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad, a Republican, offered his support for the concept in a far-reaching series of [education proposals](#) released last year. In a recent interview with *Education Week*, Jason Glass, the director of the Iowa Department of Education, said he hopes to build legislative backing for the concept in the state legislature, where each party controls one chamber.

While the idea of retaining any student is an "awful prospect," Glass said, he added that "we're not doing students any favors by promoting them to the next grade and just hoping something happens" to help them academically.

In New Mexico, Republican Gov. Susana Martinez is backing a similar proposal. The governor has supported the concept as part of a [larger early reading effort](#) that would include support for new reading coaches and supplemental instruction for struggling students.

"We know that a child that can't read by the 3rd grade is four times more likely to drop out of high school," Hanna Skandera, the governor's education secretary, designate, said in a statement. "Our children will be the leaders of our state before we know it. It's time we give them the opportunity they deserve."

Skandera knows Florida's policies well: She once served as a top [education aide](#) to Bush.

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Opinion: No Child Left Behind: A Landmark Law for Children

Education Week
By: George Miller
January 5, 2012

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/05/15miller_ep.h31.html?
k=UNTFJ1L9KPCdM%2BVzVuyOJBb%2Fp%2FHGZ4WY%2FPDF&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/05/15miller_ep.h31.html?k=UNTFJ1L9KPCdM%2BVzVuyOJBb%2Fp%2FHGZ4WY%2FPDF&cmp=clp-edweek)

The No Child Left Behind Act was a landmark law for children, reaffirming their right to an equal opportunity at a quality education. And despite some of the controversy and shortcomings associated with the law, it constituted a critical step forward in education reform. NCLB turned the lights on in our schools.

Before NCLB's passage, only a handful of states had access to data that showed student achievement broken down by gender, ethnicity, income, or English proficiency. The rest of the country was largely in the dark on how children were faring. Even worse, without knowing how much students were struggling in the classroom, no one felt the urgency to fix the problem. No Child Left Behind changed that.

Because of this law, the evidence is irrefutable that all kids can learn and succeed whatever their ZIP code or family income. We also learned that transparency can empower parents and communities when combined with action. Prior to NCLB, it wasn't that parents in low-income and low-performing schools didn't know that their children were being underserved, but there wasn't much evidence, and no one was required to do anything about it. NCLB didn't just provide the information on student achievement; it also told parents that schools had to improve.

This law is not perfect. It needs updating. A fundamental rewrite of NCLB, the most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, should reflect current best practices and protect kids in the process. With reauthorization, Congress has a tremendous opportunity to take our education system into the 21st century.

Policymakers of both parties agree that this reauthorization should allow states and districts to manage their schools in a way that current law doesn't. While the federal government will never improve an individual school, nor should it try, we should require action where the will to act doesn't otherwise exist. This means supporting the simple idea that low-performing schools should be identified and required to improve.

There is a growing consensus on the direction education policy should head in rewriting NCLB:

- States must set high standards and goals that ensure students are college- and career-ready.
- States should have more flexibility to craft their own accountability systems while ensuring schools are accountable for all students.
- States and districts should be empowered with the flexibility to improve schools based on their student, school, and community needs.
- We must ensure school performance is transparent so that parents and communities can help drive success.
- We must consolidate programs so that districts can more easily access funds, and we should provide more flexibility in what can be funded at the local level.
- States and districts must support a professional environment for teachers and school leaders, let them get back to doing their jobs, and provide them with the information and resources to succeed.

Nearly 40 states recently demonstrated support for these policies by signing up to create their own accountability systems in exchange for meeting a high bar for students through flexibility offered by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Rather than racing to the bottom to avoid accountability, states are running toward a modern education system that strikes the no-longer-elusive balance between strong accountability, high standards for students, and flexibility for states and districts.

This is the most dynamic education environment I have seen in my 37 years in public office. Now is not the time to return to the days when the system could linger at the status quo and hide the performance of some students. The days of having to choose between flexibility and strong accountability are now arguments of the past. Congress should support the states pursuing accountability and the rest of the country with a comprehensive rewrite of NCLB.

George Miller, a U.S. representative from California, is the senior Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee. He served in that same role in 2002, at the time of NCLB's passage.

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No Child Left Behind Lessons

Education Week

By: Lamar Alexander

January 5, 2012

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/01/05/15alexander_ep.h31.html?tkn=YOUF74Z6e1gpU%2FEZeCnCu0R5cRyLSRpSMvtS&cmp=clp-edweek

A decade ago, Republicans and Democrats in Congress and a Republican president enacted a plan to improve our nation's schools. Their noble goal gave us No Child Left Behind.

Unfortunately, this plan inserted too many Washington rules and regulations into matters that should have been left to communities, parents, and classroom teachers. The goal was laudable enough: All 50 million students in nearly 100,000 public schools would be proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-14 school year.

Such ambition is characteristic of Americans, who assert that all men are created equal and that anything is possible, but it proved unrealistic. Recent estimates show that at least half of the nation's schools will be labeled as "failing" the Washington-defined "adequate yearly progress" standards this year. In addition, the well-intentioned requirement that 3.2 million teachers meet a Washington definition of "highly qualified" has proved, once again, the inadequacy of a one-size-fits-all approach in a society as large and complex as ours.

There are good aspects to the law. It has helped create an environment in which all states now have put in place content standards and are conducting annual reading and math tests aligned with those standards. And all states are participating in the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#)—"the nation's report card"—providing the most reliable audit yet of the quality of state standards and tests. Through increased school choice and more charter schools, parents have new incentives for involvement in their children's schools.

Most importantly, schools and districts are reporting on the progress of individual schools. Now we have several years of school-by-school information broken down into subgroups of students. Parents, state legislators, and governors are now paying more attention to education issues and are holding their districts, schools, principals, and teachers accountable. States are plowing ahead with their own reforms.

But data from the last 10 years show that more Washington mandates and regulations imposed upon local schools have not worked as well as the authors of No Child Left Behind had hoped. Since 2000, federal funding for programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (whose current version is the No Child Left Behind Act) has increased by 73 percent, but student achievement has remained flat. Most students still are not proficient (think: grade-level) in core subjects. This decade's experience has reminded us that Washington may be able to create a better environment for school improvement, but Washington cannot make local schools better; only teachers, principals, parents, and communities can.

The federal government can set broad goals, but the secretary of education should not become a national school board chairman instructing 100,000 public schools how to achieve those goals or deciding whether each of those schools and its teachers are

succeeding or failing. The Tennessee education commissioner is in a much better position than someone in Washington to help turn around failing schools and close achievement gaps in Memphis or Nashville.

Ever since 1984, when Tennessee's master-teacher program made it the first state to pay teachers more for teaching well, I have believed that the holy grail of K-12 education is fashioning a fair system of teacher and principal evaluation that measures good teaching based in significant part on student achievement. But experience has taught us that this is much more difficult than it sounds and can best be accomplished state by state, school district by school district, and even school by school. Mandating, defining, and regulating such evaluation systems from Washington would most likely result in a compliance-driven race to the bottom.

What is especially encouraging about the last 10 years is that states have made real progress in setting higher standards and improving school performance: This effort began during 1985 to 1986 when governors banded together for a full year's focus on improving schools in response to Education Secretary Terrel H. Bell's challenge in "[A Nation at Risk](#)." That work has accelerated during this past decade. Since 2002, all but four states have adopted common-core academic standards; two consortia of states are developing common tests for those standards; and 44 states and the District of Columbia are collaborating on establishing common accountability principles for student achievement through an initiative of the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#), or CCSSO.

The No Child Left Behind Act has been a noble experiment. It has made an important contribution to the national effort to improve the quality of our schools. But there is a difference between a national concern, which education is, and a federal government solution driven by Washington. The lesson of the last 10 years is that it is time to move most decisions about whether teachers and schools are succeeding or failing out of Washington and back to states and communities. The valuable new school-by-school reports produced by No Child Left Behind can provide material for more accurate and useful school report cards devised by parents, school boards, governors, and the secretary of education. But the real job of creating better schools remains where it always has been, with parents and teachers and citizens in their own communities.

Lamar Alexander, a Republican, is the senior U.S. senator from Tennessee. He has also served as U.S. secretary of education, governor of Tennessee, and president of the University of Tennessee.

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STATE NEWS

Wisconsin: Walker, Evers unveil report aimed at enhancing reading skills

Wisconsin State Journal

By: Matthew DeFour

January 5, 2012

http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/education/local_schools/walker-evers-unveil-report-aimed-at-enhancing-reading-skills/article_28f6bc52-372b-11e1-af16-001871e3ce6c.html

Incoming kindergartners should be screened for reading ability, new teachers should pass a literacy skills test to be licensed, and private child care centers should be rated for teaching young children to read.

Those are some key recommendations of a statewide reading task force, Gov. Scott Walker and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers announced Wednesday.

The task force's report also recommended enhancing professional development opportunities for teachers and creating a public-private partnership to rally businesses and nonprofit organizations around the goal of ensuring all children can read by third grade.

"The sooner our young people can be identified for good reading habits, the better they're going to be," Walker said.

Though Wisconsin's high school graduation rate remains one of the highest in the nation, reading test scores have stagnated over the last two decades, the report notes. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Wisconsin ranked second behind Maine in 1994 on fourth-grade reading tests, but by 2011 ranked 16th.

The state also has a significant gap in reading scores related to race and low-income status. The report recommends the state require summer school for struggling students in early grades.

Rep. Sody Pope-Roberts, D-Middleton, the ranking Democrat on the Assembly Education Committee, said new changes and requirements mean added costs for school districts already reeling from budget cuts.

"While I do not disagree with any of the policies laid out," Pope-Roberts said in a statement, "it is disingenuous to believe these recommendations can be successful without adequate funding to support them."

Mary Bell, president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council, said the teachers union supports the goals of the task force, but questions Walker's track record on education. She quoted a recent survey that found 18 percent of districts cut reading specialists and 25 percent cut library staff this year.

In pitching the reading initiative during his election campaign, Walker said students who couldn't read by the end of third grade should not advance to the next grade. But after hearing objections from teachers and school officials around the state, he backed away from that approach, the governor said Wednesday.

Some of the recommendations — such as creating the public-private partnership and changing the rating system for the Department of Children and Families' YoungStar system — will require changes in state law. Sen. Luther Olsen, R-Ripon, and Rep. Steve Kestell, R-Elkhart Lake, who chair the Legislature's education committees, said they would take up the changes this session.

"These are things that would have broad bipartisan support," Walker said.

The state is also developing new teacher evaluation and school accountability systems, and the report recommends an emphasis on reading in both. For example, schools struggling with reading proficiency should be required to add new programs and assessments, it says.

Walker included \$1.2 million in the current biennial budget for the reading initiative. Olsen said the money would be best spent on ensuring a kindergartner literacy test is consistent across the state.

The kindergarten screening recommendation would require some changes in law, but the goal is to have it in place as soon as possible, Department of Public Instruction spokesman Patrick Gasper said.

The Madison School District already tests incoming kindergarten students for reading ability. The assessment has found many of the disparities in student achievement among low-income, minority students begin before a student starts school.

Evers said while most school districts around the state also have such a screening test, the tests are not consistent. The new system would provide uniformity and transparency, he said, with results reported on DPI's website.

The department also will require starting in the 2013-14 school year that all prospective elementary and special education teachers take a literacy skills test used in Massachusetts.

"This test will make teaching of reading more rigorous for our teachers," Evers said.

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New York: Governor Cuomo calls for commission on public school reform

Associated Press

By: Staff

January 4, 2012

<http://online.wsj.com/article/AP1362573e32f24feba68d84f1f2c0c1c4.html>

ALBANY, N.Y. — Gov. Andrew Cuomo says he's creating a special commission to improve public schools, likely with competitive grants.

The measure is a key part of Cuomo's State of the State speech Wednesday.

Cuomo's move would avoid the problem faced by past governors who were stymied by the state Board of Regents, which sets education policy and is appointed by the Legislature.

Cuomo would use the tactic of providing competitive grants to encourage specific reforms that he learned as housing secretary under President Bill Clinton and is also used by President Barack Obama.

He has said he wants to change the debate of over education from spending to student performance, noting New York trails 30 states in some measures.

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Florida: Opinion: New, tougher FCAT will drop school grades

Florida Today

By: Matt Reed

January 5, 2012

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20120105/COLUMNISTS0207/301050032/Matt-Reed-New-tougher-FCAT-will-drop-school-grades?odyssey=mod|newswell|text|Opinion|s>

But it's for the best: More rigor to improve college readiness

Savor today's news about more Brevard schools earning A grades under the state's accountability system. Next year, school

grades will drop statewide when Florida applies an all-new, tougher scoring scale to the standardized tests that count for so much.

Simply put, we're about to impose higher standards on Florida students to better prepare them for college or careers.

That goal will be easy to forget amid the shock.

Expect Brevard parents to squawk when they see their kids' math and reading scores change from level 4s to level 3s or from 3s to 2s on this spring's "FCAT 2.0" exams.

Expect teachers to gripe again about "teaching to the test" as new data prods them to refine instruction.

Expect homeowners to fret that their neighborhood schools have dropped in quality and could take property values down with them.

"People really look at those school grades," said Karen Schafer, director of accountability, testing and evaluation for Brevard Public Schools. "The perception in the community if those grades drop ... That's a huge issue for us."

In truth, our kids will not have gotten dumber, though slightly more may have to forgo high school electives to take more math.

Our top-rated school district will not have collapsed, though it will have fewer A- and B-rated elementary schools, data show.

"These scores will mean something completely new," Superintendent Brian Binggeli said. "It's really designed to get kids to think more deeply. Some of the reading is more inferential ... The new mantra is that these kids need to be collegeready."

It's a good mantra.

A new grading scale, revised FCAT and updated proficiency standards will immediately add rigor to math and English education — and, later, science — in a state system already ranked No. 5 in the country by *Education Week*. Funding and college readiness are the two factors keeping us from the top.

The new system creates a fresh scoring continuum out of a hodgepodge of tests, subjects and grading scales added to the FCAT over a decade. That way, educators can more accurately track students' development from kindergarten through 12th grade. Principals can better direct merit pay to teachers based on student progress from one grade or school to the next.

Lessons in change

How much tougher will it be? If the new FCAT scoring system were applied this past year, Florida would have had triple the number of F schools and double the number of Ds.

Try to bear a few things in mind as Brevard braces for the tougher system.

First, improvement will come more slowly than it did a decade ago when Florida adopted its system of testing and school accountability, Binggeli said. Back then, educators achieved huge gains simply by learning to analyze test data and by incorporating the Sunshine State Standards into textbooks and lesson plans.

Today, educators have already done both.

"What's left is just teaching and doing better in every classroom," Binggeli said. Starting this school year, all Brevard teachers are subject to exhaustive, ongoing performance evaluations.

College-readiness

Second, the new FCAT scale will be calibrated to national college entrance exams so the high school scores we consider "proficient" and require for graduation truly signal readiness for college or vocational school.

Turns out, Florida students' reading performance gives them a head start.

Among Brevard high schoolers considered not reading at grade level by Florida standards, about 20 percent earned scores on the ACT exam that label them "college ready." Florida eighth-graders posted the second-highest scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress out of all U.S. eighth graders deemed "proficient" on their state-level reading tests. The data show slightly more Brevard 10th graders will pass the FCAT reading *and* math tests required for graduation under the revised standards.

Still, math requires the most improvement systemwide.

Spinning lower grades

Third, expect the lower school grades based on 2012 tests to become easy targets for teachers unions and public school haters who will politically spin them as reasons to raise or cut spending. Of course, there will be no correlation.

Unions will blame the perceived drop in school grades on cuts to state spending during the past three years. Raise spending, and grades will rise, they'll say.

Conservative think tanks will argue that grades and scores dropped in the same year that state leaders restored \$1 billion in school funding. Therefore, more school spending makes education worse, as they were fond of saying in 2011.

On the homefront, try to see the tougher FCAT standards and school grading for what they are: a self-imposed effort to improve our kids' futures. It won't be easy — nor should it be. Says Binggeli: "Rigorous standards mean you're probably going to fail a little bit along the way."

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New Hampshire lawmakers pass school material bill

Associated Press

By: Staff

January 4, 2012

http://www.boston.com/news/local/new_hampshire/articles/2012/01/04/nh_lawmakers_pass_school_material_bill/

CONCORD, N.H.—New Hampshire lawmakers have passed a vetoed bill that allows parents to object to school course materials and request using alternatives.

The House had failed in September to override Gov. John Lynch's veto of the bill. The House reconsidered Wednesday and voted 255-112 to send the bill to the Senate, which passed it 17-5.

Under the bill, the school district and parents have to agree on an alternative plan for the child to meet state requirements for education in the subject area. The change is at the parents' expense.

Lynch objected it would be disruptive to classrooms and be difficult to administer.

Supporters argued parents should have the right to choose alternative materials.

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