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NATIONAL NEWS

Study Finds Few Links Between Teacher Characteristics, Performance

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

September 8, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/09/qualifications_such_as_certifi.html

Qualifications such as certification and holding a master's degree bear no relationship to a teacher's performance as measured by growth in student test scores, concludes a new brief released by the Manhattan Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank.

The brief summarizes a study conducted by senior fellow Marcus Winters and two colleagues, which is slotted for publication in the *Economics of Education Review*. For the study, the researchers looked at four years of longitudinal data from Florida that link elementary teachers' training and student learning gains. They found no correlations between any of the teacher characteristics studied and student learning, with the exception of small benefits for teachers who engaged in certain pedagogy courses.

The finding on experience is probably the most interesting, as many other studies using panel data of this type find that experience does make a difference in the first few years of teaching. And on master's degrees, studies have linked higher achievement with teachers who hold content-specific degrees in math and science, though those studies didn't always correct for students' prior achievement histories. For more, see a summary I wrote not long ago for the Education Writers' Association.

The authors of the brief assert, not surprisingly, that this should be a wake-up call to change the current modes of teacher pay. It can also be read, however, as yet another reason to take a close look at teachers' preparation and professional development.

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Bringing Professional Development Into the 21st Century

Education Week

By: Alvin H. Crawford

September 9, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/09/09/03crawford.h31.html?tkn=ZMXFZqe%2B6ZrSOSzcdKnULP3bLjb76xIIT79h&cmp=clp-edweek>

Our school systems are broken, but everyone seems to have his or her favorite villain rather than a strategic approach to producing positive student outcomes. Unions, teachers, districts, parents, politics, school choice, and competition all play a

role, but the blame game doesn't address the core problem. Here's the reality: If we fix public education, every child will have an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty, and the United States will have an opportunity to play a role in the global knowledge economy. The challenge is determining the real source of the problem and providing a solution that works for every school in the nation. And those are no small tasks.

Research suggests the problems lie not with the students but with the adults. Teacher-performance research clearly illustrates we have a teaching problem in school districts. It suggests the quality of a classroom teacher is the single most important element in a child's success. Given such data, one might conclude there are more suboptimal teachers than great ones. But let's not immediately point fingers at teachers. Arguably, most enter the profession hoping to have an impact on children, yet a third leave after three years, and 50 percent after five years. The heart of the problem is that there are too many poorly trained administrators, principals, and teachers. In most industries, people are considered the most important asset, and corporate leaders ensure they are trained to do their jobs effectively. Public schools should be no different.

However, most foundations and policymakers have focused on accountability and evaluation rather than training. The assumption: If we measure teachers more effectively, we can get rid of the bad ones. The problem is too deep and systemic, though. In short, we cannot fire or hire our way out of this problem. The statistics suggest that if we develop a support system for principals and teachers to train them effectively, we will change education culture, retain new educators more effectively, enhance the performance of existing staff members, and identify those who, despite effective training, can't meet standards and should pursue other careers.

According to several studies, school districts spend more than \$10,000 on teacher professional development per teacher, per year. The number is startling and, in most cases, represents an amount far greater than any district budgets or believes it spends. In most instances, staff development is funded through a combination of federal funds (Titles I, II, III, and IV, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), several district-level departmental budgets (curriculum and instruction, accountability, professional development, and human resources), and school-level budgets. In most instances, no centralized accounting exists for those dollars, either in how they're spent or their overall impact.

But the body of research reveals that staff-development costs, including central-office and local staff, hours of teacher time, stipends, salary increases, substitutes, facilities, instructors, and material expenditures hover in the range of \$8,000 to \$16,000 per teacher, per year, especially in larger districts. Most districts have no idea they spend that much on staff development. Sadly though, most administrators agree their professional-development outlay has no correlation with student-achievement results.

The \$10,000-per-teacher cost could be justified if a significant change in teacher practice or student achievement were the result. But most professional development today lacks alignment to student-achievement needs, fidelity of implementation, and scale or reach. Professional-development days are historically spread throughout the year and delivered by internal resources through one-day trainings with little or no follow-up. In most cases, the inch-deep and train-the-trainer approaches to professional development won't transform practice.

Scaling effective practice is also a significant issue. Most training takes place outside the classroom, an arrangement that requires coordination of days, substitutes, trainers, and facilities. This means many initiatives take six to eight years to reach all teachers in a given school or district, creating isolated pockets of knowledge but no systemic change in overall teacher practice. Research should dictate the model and methods for training all employees, but curiously, over 15 years ago, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, or CPRE, wrote a report on professional development that largely echoes the same problems we have today: lack of alignment, fidelity, and scale.

There is a "paucity" of solid research on the impact of professional development on student achievement, the U.S. Department of Education has found. In reviewing 1,300 studies on the subject, the department found that only nine of them met What Works Clearinghouse standards for research. However, the nine studies agreed that "teachers who receive substantial professional development" can raise student achievement "by about 21 percentile points." A report Requires Adobe Acrobat Reader by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education concluded that to be effective, professional development must be focused, engaging, intensive, linked to student learning, supported with coaching, and integrated with other school initiatives, and continuous for "an average of about 50 hours or more on a given topic."

Given the challenges and the evidence, how do we deliver effective professional development to teachers in a way that aligns to strategic objectives, provides the fidelity and rigor required to change instructional practice, and offers the scale required to address the needs of more than 50 million students?

The only effective way to scale professional development is to leverage online learning. Online professional development can deliver dozens of hours to teachers within eight weeks and includes collaborative learning environments supported effectively by coaching, modeling, mentoring, observation, and feedback. Online professional development works because it reduces travel costs and coordination, minimizes time out of the classroom, and allows educators to learn at their own pace. In fact, research suggests that online learning happens faster than face-to-face learning, with increased retention of the material.

Online professional development engages educators in high-quality learning by adhering to best practices in adult learning. It promotes differentiated coursework while enabling teachers to engage collaboratively with colleagues who share their learning needs. By delivering effective, differentiated online professional development, districts leverage the powerful advantages of technology and the online-learning environment. Districts delivering online professional development realize cost savings, scale critical instructional practices, differentiate teacher learning, advance strategic human-capital management, maintain intentional

fidelity, and transform teaching.

Building educator capacity this way allows districts to focus on fixing the problems, immediately. Imagine if a district could effectively train 5,000 teachers in the common-core curriculum, differentiated instruction, cultural competency, effective teaching, instruction of English-language learners, formative assessment, and highly engaging classroom practice. Those courses could be delivered in less than six months to all teachers by the nation's leading practitioners, with research-proven practice.

Imagine the dialogue. Imagine the engagement when principals, teachers, and coaches go about their work. There would be a common language and culture focused on addressing the problems. There would be a support system to help transform learning into practice. There would be a way to evaluate whether teachers who receive training and face-to-face support can meet the demands of rigorous instruction through end-of-year evaluations. And there would be transformational improvement in the ability of teachers to meet the needs of their students.

It's time to take action and invest in developing our educators to meet the needs of 21st-century students by becoming 21st-century teachers. We can solve this problem by focusing our efforts, our investments, and our school districts on building capacity through online professional development.

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Middle schools: What successful charters do

Washington Post

By: Bill Turque

September 8, 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/dc-schools-insider/post/middle-schools-what-successful-charters-do/2011/09/08/gIQA30XCK_blog.html

At Wednesday's D.C. Council roundtable, several leaders of public charters with far more success than most DCPS middle schools described the elements they believe make their programs effective.

Susan Schaeffler, founder and CEO, KIPP DC (Wards 2 and 7, 1,000 middle school students in three schools, AIM, KEY and WILL. Average DC CAS reading proficiency: 62 percent, math 77 percent)

The foundation to KIPP's model is the extended day, which runs to 5 p.m. It gives students about 35 percent more instructional time per year than DCPS, which knocks off at 3:15 p.m. It also costs an additional \$1,100 per student per year, a shortfall that KIPP makes up with private fundraising. Schaeffler says KIPP and other schools with longer days deserve more money from the city.

Public charter schools, which are open to students from across the city, are frequently accused of "creaming" the best students from traditional public schools, a practice they consistently deny. In response to questions from Council member Tommy Wells (D-Ward 6), Schaeffler said KIPP would be willing to consider opening a school under contract with DCPS in which students from the surrounding community would have the right to attend.

Schaeffler said the issue is not about serving a specific community, but about other factors that come with partnering with DCPS, including limits on their ability to hire, fire and evaluate teachers. Nearly all charter schools employ non-union teachers.

"There are a lot of factors that keep KIPP from entering into a contract," Schaeffler said.

Jami Dunham, Head of School, Paul PCS (Ward 4, 600 students, grades 6-9, 64 percent reading proficiency, 72 percent math)

Dunham said their model revolves "intentional messaging," a team approach to student support and a well-rounded program.

"Students hear every day and in every classroom that they are merit scholars, that they are being prepared to go to college, that they are being prepared to succeed in life," Dunham said of the messaging. "It is developmentally appropriate for adolescents at this stage of development to question, to demand a rationale and to resist authority. We counter this with consistently providing the rationale that what we are expecting our scholars to do will prepare them for the next stage in their lives."

Paul's team approach involves developing small groups of students with teams of teachers. The teachers meet weekly to analyze student data, address student concerns and create individual plans for kids experiencing academic or behavioral challenges.

Dunham also stressed the importance of a diverse, well-rounded program of academics and extracurriculars. "Finding a place to belong is critical for middle schoolers," Dunham said. "We have scholars who would label themselves as a techie, an artist, a dancer, a jock, a bookworm, an aspiring politician and an environmentalist."

Martha Cutts, Head of School, Washington Latin PCS (Ward 4, 575 students, grades 5-12, 77 percent reading, 84 percent math)

Cutts cited careful hiring of teachers, low class size, clear expectations for behavior and school-home communication.

"Hiring is the most important thing I do," said Cutts. "My goal is always to hire teachers who have not only expertise in and enthusiasm for what they teach, but also a genuine love of and interest in working with young people. Successful teachers will be able to communicate to their students their desire to know them as individuals and their commitment to seeing each of them succeed."

Cutts said that while some research minimizes the importance of class size and student load, she believes they matter. "I don't believe, for instance, that an English teacher can grade weekly essays or writing assignments and give substantive feedback for 150 students. I am uncomfortable if a teacher has more than 90 students to teach," she said.

Staff members oversee small groups of students (10 to 12) so that there is "at least one adult overseeing a student's school experience, both academic and social," Cutts said. That includes regular meetings in homeroom or during an advisory period and strong lines of communication with parents. "The goal should always be to have students connect with at least one adult at school whom they feel they can trust, ask for advice, or go to with a concern or question," she said.

Staff takes time at the beginning of the school year to establish clear expectations for behavior, with a code of conduct that stresses character and values. "Taking time to discuss these issues is just as important as teaching reading or mathematics," she said.

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FLORIDA NEWS

Florida: Hillsborough teachers will soon receive their first year's grades under Gates plan

St. Petersburg Times

By: Marlene Sokol

September 9, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/hillsborough-teachers-will-soon-receive-their-first-years-grades-under/1190556>

TAMPA — After years of training and explaining, celebrating and anticipating, Hillsborough County schoolteachers are about to see where they stand.

The final scores will be delivered any day now, completing the first evaluations under the nationally watched Gates system.

Empowering Effective Teachers, as the program is formally called, replaces simple principal evaluations with a complex set of assessments that ultimately will determine teachers' pay.

The idea is to make proficiency more important than seniority. But school leaders are venturing into uncharted territory as they release the first scores.

"I think there is a lot of anxiety," said Hillsborough Classroom Teacher Association president Jean Clements, who worked closely with the administration in designing the system.

"It's like report card day, but on a whole new level."

Already, teachers know how they scored on their evaluations by principals and peers. And they know that on the so-called written portion, they are far less likely to receive perfect scores than in the old days.

Last year, under the old evaluation system, 30 percent of the district's roughly 11,000 teachers got a perfect score and were all clumped together, said David Steele, Hillsborough's Gates project director.

This time, only two teachers earned perfect scores in the written evaluations. "To reward your highest performers, you need to be able to separate all of those who previously were getting the same score," Steele said.

The final result teachers will be given in the coming days is based largely on student test scores.

Statisticians at the University of Wisconsin, which specializes in this type of analysis, are comparing students to similar students in measuring their gains. They are considering, for example, whether a student is a non-native English speaker, whether he is older than his classmates, and what his performance was like in prior years.

That's why, even though teachers already know how their students scored on pre-tests and post-tests, Steele said it is virtually impossible for them to predict their scores.

"You want to be as transparent as you possibly can be, but you have this line between transparency and accuracy," he said.

"And, unfortunately, if you wanted to take a student score and figure out how that converted to a teacher's score, you would need a Ph.D. in mathematics to be able to do it."

Hillsborough, in securing a \$100 million grant in 2009 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, placed itself at the forefront of a statewide move toward teacher accountability. Where other districts are now mandated by law to devise new evaluation systems that disregard seniority, Hillsborough enjoys a degree of autonomy because of Gates.

District officials have seven years to refine the process and study its effectiveness. They'll collect two full years of data before dividing teachers into categories based on their scores. And they'll collect three years of data before using it to determine pay.

Even then, Clements said, "We're never done. We won't find the perfect model."

As hard as the process might be for some teachers, she contends it's a vast improvement over the old one. "It was more like compiling a checklist," she said. "You got to bank points for being acceptable."

Since the system was revised, she said, she has heard from veteran teachers who now brainstorm with one another about their lesson plans.

"This is something that is surprising and amazing them," Clements said. "For the first time in their entire career, they are seeing teachers talk to each other about their practice."

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Florida: Regular schools push for same freedoms as charters

Orlando Sentinel

By: Dave Weber

September 8, 2011

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/features/education/os-districts-want-charter-rights-20110905.0.200108.story>

School-district officials across Central Florida and the state say they are tired of charter schools getting all of the breaks, and they want the Legislature to give them more freedoms, too.

With a budget crisis hampering many school districts, officials in Seminole, Orange and other districts are eager to unload costly provisions of state law, such as requirements to bus students to school.

Charter schools don't have to do it, they argue, so why should they?

"Everyone should have the same regulations," said Bill Vogel, superintendent of Seminole County schools, which faces an estimated \$22 million shortfall for the 2012-13 school year.

"Let's level the playing field."

Simmering dissatisfaction with the disparity between requirements for traditional schools versus the charter schools favored by the Republican-led Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott has reached a flash point in several districts. Orange and Seminole are calling for changes to state law, and the Florida School Boards Association is expected to ask the Legislature when it meets early next year to consider lifting restrictions on all districts in the state.

"It just does not make sense that we all do not get what they have given the charter schools," said Wayne Blanton, head of the School Boards Association.

Sen. David Simmons, R-Maitland, who heads the Senate's education appropriations committee, said giving traditional public schools more freedoms is "certainly something worth discussing."

"It is important that we foster charter schools that are accountable and doing a good job," Simmons said. "And it is important that we likewise foster our traditional public schools."

The law authorizing charter schools, which are independently operated but funded with tax dollars, provides that they are exempt from all but a handful of the most basic school laws.

Charters have to administer the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and similar required exams, must provide services to disabled students, can't discriminate and must abide by certain health and safety regulations.

Charters also have to follow public-meeting and records laws, and will have to adhere to the strict new teacher-contract and evaluation requirements adopted by the Legislature earlier this year.

On everything else, they get to slide.

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Florida: Dayspring Academy teacher creates DIY SMART Board alternative

St. Petersburg Times

By: Jeffrey Solochek

September 9, 2011

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/dayspring-academy-teacher-creates-diy-smart-board-alternative/1190520>

NEW PORT RICHEY — Like most schools these days, the Dayspring Academy charter school wants to add more technology to its classrooms to enhance student learning.

"If our students want to become professionals, they have to be able to use technology at high levels," middle school principal Sara Calleja said.

Yet with costs high and money scarce — Florida's charter schools for years have received minimal funding for capital supplies such as computers — the school's options appeared limited. But then one of the school's science and computer teachers learned about an inexpensive way to turn classrooms high-tech.

Using two \$29 Wii remotes (which serve as cameras), a \$20 infrared pen and a \$500 multimedia projector, teacher Tim Greenier turned his classroom white board into an interactive screen. It doesn't just have to be a white board, either.

He's run lessons on the floor, on desktops and on walls, too. He just connected his equipment to his iPad and, for a fraction of the cost of a SMART Board or Promethean ACTIVboard, livened up his lessons.

"Look at the simplicity of this system, but how unbelievably interactive it makes it for the students," said Greenier, who picked up the idea from a technology conference he attended in Orlando. "You now have the students who might try to fly low wanting to join in."

He piloted the system, which relies on free software and relatively inexpensive replaceable parts, most of last year. He even tested it at home. "My son did the entire FCAT Explorer on the living room wall," Greenier said.

This year, almost all of Dayspring's classrooms are being equipped with it.

"We didn't have the ability to put in Promethean boards at \$4,000 to \$5,000 a pop," said school business manager and co-founder John Legg, the state representative. "This worked perfectly, for less than \$700."

Of course, simply having the ability to use the technology does not necessarily translate into higher student academic achievement. Effective teaching still must occur, incorporating the tools that are available.

That's why Dayspring Academy is training its teachers in the best ways to use Wii projection, as well as newly donated computer tablets, for educational lessons.

"If they don't know how, it sits in a box and they don't use it," Legg said.

Sixth-grade humanities teacher Kelly Covic had the system installed in her classroom a few days ago. She said she feels ahead of the curve because she's used a projector to show PowerPoint presentations in the past.

But with interactivity, new doors have opened, Covic said.

"I'm looking at the different options I can use in class," she said. "I'm really excited."

So, too, are the school's students, many of whom have not used the interactive boards in the past.

"It's better than just reading out of a textbook," said sixth-grader Rachel Lucas, 11. "That gets boring after a while."

Greenier's lessons, combined with the game-like quality of the computers, make learning fun, said sixth-grader Pilar Santamaria, 11.

"He teaches us really good, so we don't have any problems remembering what he says," Pilar said.

In his trial run, Greenier said, he saw students become more engaged in class. "From that, we saw better scores."

Last year, A-rated Dayspring scored among Pasco County's highest FCAT scores in both math and science.

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STATE NEWS

Third of Iowa schools missed achievement targets

Des Moines Register

By: Sheena Dooley

September 9, 2011

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20110909/NEWS/309090052/1004/NEWS02/Third-Iowa-schools-missed-achievement-targets>

More than one-third of Iowa schools fell short of federal achievement goals under No Child Left Behind during the 2010-11 school year, according to a report released Thursday by the Iowa Department of Education.

A record 524 schools missed targets. They were flagged for low student passing rates on state reading and math tests, low high school graduation rates, and elementary and middle school attendance problems.

In addition, a record 415 schools and 30 districts landed on the Iowa Department of Education's "in need of assistance" list, meaning the schools and districts failed to meet expectations for at least two consecutive years.

The implications for underperforming schools remain to be seen. Iowa officials this fall plan to apply for a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education that would free the state from some of the federal law's mandates. If approved, the move would potentially change how schools and districts are judged and the consequences they face for falling short of goals.

Many schools under the current law will be forced to notify parents, offer extra tutoring, allow students to change schools, replace their principals or draw up other plans to improve.

Leaders are waiting for federal officials to release more information this month before moving forward, said Jason Glass, Iowa Department of Education director.

"I'm not sure if the law is any more or any less relevant today than it was a year ago," said Paul Gausman, Sioux City schools superintendent. The district had 17 schools on the state's list. "Today we are living under the law of No Child Left Behind. We have to use that one snapshot to create these designations.

"It's my hope that in the future we will create a meaningful assessment system that can give a much more accurate picture of the comprehensive successes in public schools," he added.

The report also showed Iowa's fourth- and eighth-graders made slight gains in reading and math last school year on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. Achievement of the state's 11th-graders, however, remained relatively unchanged.

Additionally, the state's graduation rate reached 88.8 percent, up from 87.3 percent during the 2009-10 school year. Attendance among the state's kindergarten through eighth-graders made little movement, with the average daily attendance rate remaining around 95 percent, according to the report.

More schools landed on the state's list despite making gains in some areas, because the expectations for proficiency climbed this year, officials said.

Nearly 30 percent of Iowa's 1,401 schools landed on the state's in need of assistance list this year, compared to the 25 percent — or 356 — identified in 2009-10.

The Des Moines school district — the state's largest — had 48 of its 66 schools on the list, two more than last year.

"We should always be concerned about schools moving into those higher levels of accountability under the designations in this report," Glass said. "It's important to temper that, though, with the fundamental flaw in No Child Left Behind. It ratchets up these goals every year. We are going to get to a point where, unless we get relief from Congress or a waiver, there is going to be a dramatic increase in the number of schools labeled."

No Child Left Behind, put in place 10 years ago, calls for schools that receive federal money to make sure 100 percent of students in certain grades show basic reading and math skills by 2014. Schools nationwide are flagged each year for state test scores, attendance and graduation rates that fail to meet annual targets.

Schools that miss goals for two consecutive years are named to the list. It takes two years in a row of meeting goals to be removed from the list.

Cedar Rapids was one of the districts to see some of its schools removed. Hoover and Polk elementary schools both met targets for two consecutive years. Polk had the district's largest percentage of low-income students.

The district's elementary schools improved in 13 areas where they were previously flagged, meaning that one could have improved in reading but stayed on the state's list because they missed goals in math, said Mary Ellen Maske, Cedar Rapids executive administrator for preschool through eighth grade.

Maske credits Cedar Rapids' growth to stronger improvement plans for each school. Also, officials have dug into data to find out why its African-American, special education and low-income students struggle and have provided them with additional help.

Middle and elementary school students also receive 30 minutes a day of instruction that targets the areas where they have fallen behind, she said.

“Our teachers are working together,” Maske said. “They are looking closely at assessment data, and then really thinking about what will work best for each child. That has definitely benefited us.”

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Arne Duncan Interview: Education chief explains his optimism for Detroit Public Schools, how Washington can help the district rebound

Michigan Live

By: Jonathon Oosting

September 9, 2011

http://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/index.ssf/2011/09/the_arne_duncan_interview_educ.html

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stopped in Detroit on Thursday, where he met with local and state leaders to discuss attempts to turn around persistently low-performing schools.

MLive.com talked with Duncan later in the day as he continued his "Education and the Economy" bus tour through the Midwest. Read the full interview below.

You said today that Detroit has a chance to be the fastest-improving district in the nation. What gives you that confidence?

I came to Detroit a couple of years ago and was just really, really concerned. What's happened in Detroit for far too long is simply been devastating for the students and ultimately devastating for the city. But I think the stars are aligned today in a pretty unique way, and Detroit for all the historic challenges, I really think has this amazing chance to break through. From the governor to the mayor to the state board to the state superintendent to Roy Roberts, there's just an alignment and a commitment, an urgency, a willingness to challenge the status quo that I haven't seen before. I think the philanthropic community is absolutely poised to help. Parents are stepping up.

So I just see a confluence of leadership from the grass roots and from the top that just doesn't exist in other places. There will be debates, there will be bumps and bruises along the road, but stepping back and looking at the big picture I think Detroit has this amazing, amazing chance. I was just trying to really challenge the community. The goal is not just to get a little better. The goal is to get dramatically better and to do it as fast as they can. I think Detroit, as I look across other urban school districts, I honestly think Detroit has as good a chance, if not better, to really accelerate progress, to accelerate change over the next couple of years.

How can the federal government help Detroit achieve that goal?

We just want to be a great partner. I tried to be very, very clear on that. There's a number of different things we can do, and if Detroit wants to learn from both the success and the failures of other districts, we can be as helpful as they'd like us to be in that process. If Detroit looks to turn around lower-performing schools, we want them to use our resources, our school-improvement grants to do that. As Detroit works on the highest standards that the state adopted, we want to support those efforts. As Detroit thinks about rewarding great teachers and great principals, our teacher incentive fund is a great place for them to be looking. There was a question earlier today about creating a college-going culture, and we have a lot of resources and expertise about how you raise expectations.

So I think as a series of things we could do and we're more than willing to help, but I really want to follow Detroit's lead. Whatever they think would be most helpful, whatever role for us to play, I want to be there. I want to hold myself accountable for being a great, great partner here. I am deeply personally and emotionally vested in seeing the Detroit Public Schools improve.

Last year, you encouraged an attempt to let voters decide whether Mayor Bing should assume control of the district, and you've been very praise worthy of state-appointed emergency manager Roy Roberts. Do you believe a single accountable individual can be more effective than an elected school board in a district like Detroit?

I think the governance structure is in a pretty good spot now. There's been some pretty significant changes. The mayor's stepped up, the governor's stepped up, and what I look for is courage and determination and a willingness to challenge the status quo. I see that. So for me the debate now is not about governance, it should strictly be about how we accelerate academic achievement. That has to be the focus of the conversation. I think Detroit and the state have put themselves in a very good position here. A lot has changed from the positive in the two years since my previous visit, and it's very, very encouraging.

Like many other cities around the nation, there's some unease about charter schools and whether they threaten the traditional public school system in Detroit. What would you tell parents who are choosing between a public charter and traditional public schools?

Charter schools are public schools. They use our tax dollars and they are accountable to us. I would just say very simply that good charter schools are part of the solution and bad charter schools are part of the problem. Good traditional schools are part of the solution and bad traditional schools are part of the problem. We were in an amazing traditional school today, and we need

to replicate those successes and learn from them. We cannot tolerate schools that aren't working. It's a false debate. The debate is not charter versus traditional. The debate is about success versus academic failure. We just need a lot more very, very high performing schools. And ultimately giving parents and students options, particularly in disadvantaged communities where historically they haven't had them.

Gov. Rick Snyder recently announced the Education Achievement System authority, which is poised to take over operation of the lowest-performing five percent of schools, first in Detroit and later the rest of the state. What are your thoughts on the EAS?

What I'm please to hear and understand, is that for the first time the state is really taking on those chronically under-performing schools. These are not the 95 percent, these are not the 19 out of 20, these are the one in 20 that simply aren't working for children. And I feel very strongly that as a country, for way too long we have been far too complacent, far to accepting of the status quo, which was doing great damage to children and communities. It's been deeply disturbing to me. And so I'm happy to see the state step up and say 'We have chronic underperformance and we're not going to stay on the sidelines. We're not going to perpetuate the status quo. We're trying to do some things very differently.' It's hard work, it's controversial, but it definitely has to happen and it definitely needs to be going on. Without knowing all the details, I get the sense that people are embracing this work and I think it's a very positive step in the right direction.

What can Detroit learn from other urban districts, such as Chicago, where you spent a lot of time?

Well, you can look at the data. Coming from Chicago, a large urban school district, I'm very familiar with those challenges. But Detroit is smaller, it's more manageable and I think it's ripe to take off. And so Detroit should look at the successes and failures of Chicago and New York and L.A. and D.C., and Detroit can sit back and pick and choose. 'Let's follow this and this and do this our own way.' I think it's a unique opportunity for Detroit. It's urgent to take it to really look at the landscape. Pick those five or ten urban school systems. No one's got this perfectly figured out. They all have strengths and weaknesses, and that's why I think Detroit can leapfrog past other districts, because they are really embarking on this journey I think with really fresh eyes and a fresh perspective.

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Arizona Gov. Brewer launching website on school improvements

Education Week

By: Staff

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http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2011/09/08/453437zbrewereducation_ap.html

Gov. Jan Brewer is unveiling her latest education initiative, a new website to convey information to the public about wide-ranging efforts under way and planned to improve student achievement.

The arizonaready.com website is scheduled to go live Thursday afternoon after Brewer holds a news conference.

Brewer also is restating her improvement goals. Those include increasing third-graders' ability to meet reading standards, raising the high school graduation rate and doubling the number of students receiving bachelor's degrees.

Implementation steps already taken include changing school ratings to letter grades and generally prohibiting promotion of third-graders who don't meet reading standards.

The plan grew out of Arizona's unsuccessful effort to compete for federal innovation grants.

Brewer also is to announce Arizona's participation in a high school competition to enhance students' interest in aeronautics and transportation.

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