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**Subject:** Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 12/6/11

## Foundation for Florida's Future, Key Reads: 12/6/11

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### STATE NEWS

## Setting a Higher Standard for Teacher Entry in Iowa

Education Week

By: Sean Cavanagh

December 5, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state\\_edwatch/2011/12/post\\_12.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/12/post_12.html)

Securing a place in the teaching profession will become a bit tougher in Iowa, if Gov. Terry Branstad and the state's school chief, Jason Glass, have their way.

Branstad, a Republican, has proposed requiring a minimum 3.0 grade-point average for admission to teacher-education colleges in the state, as part of a [package of proposed changes](#) to school policy unveiled earlier this year, many of which would require legislative approval.

He's also [called for creating](#) a more rigorous screening process for candidates for teacher education programs; establishing new teacher-education scholarships with the goal of luring more educators into high-need subjects; requiring teachers to take more subject-specific coursework and classes in core academic subjects; and placing more of an emphasis on in-class training for aspiring teachers, and giving them access to mentors, among other changes. Selective admissions requirements for aspiring educators—coupled with ongoing training and support—[is a staple](#) of some high-performing countries' systems, as *Ed Week* has [reported](#).

The governor has also called for overhauling the compensation system for educators more broadly, and raising starting teacher pay—though he [recently said](#) he wants to hold off on trying to get that piece through the legislature, as he seeks to build support for the plan.

This week the *Des Moines Register* takes an interesting look at the implications of the minimum GPA requirement.

By the newspaper's analysis, one of five teachers would have been turned away last year at teachers' colleges in the state, had the requirement been in effect. The *Register* was [able to obtain](#) information on applicants from three public university programs, though the vast majority of private institutions refused to provide it. Critics of Branstad's proposal say it would exclude teacher-candidates who may have struggled as undergraduates but could still be effective teachers; others wonder if it will exclude a higher number of minority candidates, the paper noted.

Glass told me that state officials are still examining whether to allow some flexibility on the 3.0 GPA requirement—such as allowing an aspiring teacher who does not meet the standard to gain entry through high scores on the Praxis, a teacher-licensing exam, or through other means.

The new standard would apply to both public and private institutions in Iowa, Glass added, because the state accredits all of those teacher programs and would not do so if they don't adhere to the standard.

"It's one way to add selectivity into the teacher workforce," Glass said of the minimum GPA. "The principle here is that we want to raise the bar."

Glass said he understood critics' concerns that the GPA requirement could create challenges for filling workforce needs and

luring minority candidates into the profession, but he said the state is counting on teacher colleges taking steps to overcome those challenges, such as by putting in place more aggressive recruitment strategies.

The *Register's* finding, showing that one-fifth of aspiring teachers not meeting the 3.0 threshold, "shows that we can be more selective and should be more selective in developing teachers and a more well-prepared workforce," he said.

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## Iowa Governor Branstad: Survey shows support for school changes

Associated Press

By: Mike Glover

December 5, 2011

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-ap-ia-branstad-schools.0.2978059.story>

DES MOINES, Iowa – A survey of participants in an education summit held last summer showed broad agreement that Iowa's school system needs an overhaul, Gov. Terry Branstad said Monday as he built his case for education changes he'll propose in the next legislative session.

"There is a clear consensus that Iowa's education system should be elevated," Branstad said at his weekly news conference.

The governor sponsored an education summit meeting last summer that brought together teachers, parents, administrators and school board members. He sent a survey to 1,600 of those attending and got responses from 598.

Branstad said more than 80 percent of those surveyed agreed that student performance has stagnated over the past decade, and major changes are needed. He said the survey results give him momentum to propose big changes to Iowa's school system when lawmakers convene next month.

"There is consensus that Iowa's school system should be elevated to among the best in the world," Branstad said

Branstad will likely propose tougher standards for teacher education and changes to student evaluations. He said details will be released before lawmakers convene on Jan. 9.

Other survey results showed that 85 percent agreed that the state should be more selective in admitting students into teacher preparation, and another 73 percent said student performance should be a factor in evaluating teachers. A majority also agreed that 11th graders should all be given college entrance exams, and agreed to restrictions on promoting third-graders who haven't demonstrated reading skills.

After last summer's education summit, Branstad proposed an overhaul to Iowa's education system, including a tiered system for teachers. The plan started with beginning teachers and progressed through master teachers, with pay linked to classroom performance.

After meetings throughout the state on the package, Branstad said he would delay seeking legislative approval of the teacher pay plan for a year.

Branstad said Monday that more work was needed to convince educators to support the teacher pay plan.

"That is not being abandoned," the governor said. "We said this is going to require more study. There's a lot of questions and misunderstanding."

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## Michigan: East Grand Rapids schools leap into laptops

Grand Rapids Press

By: Erin Albanese

Advance Newspapers December 6, 2011

[http://www.mlive.com/east-grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/12/east\\_grand\\_rapids\\_schools\\_leap.html](http://www.mlive.com/east-grand-rapids/index.ssf/2011/12/east_grand_rapids_schools_leap.html)

EAST GRAND RAPIDS — Parents, get ready to add iPads or laptops to that list of school supplies.

By the 2014-15 school year, all East Grand Rapids Public Schools third- through 12th-graders will use wireless devices in class.

The Board of Education on Monday discussed fully integrating laptops, touch-screen computers, and other devices as it rolls out its Engage 1:1 Program, beginning with teacher training this year and use at the high school next fall. The program will be implemented in the middle school in 2013-14, followed by the elementary schools.

The district started a pilot program with five classrooms using netbooks in 2009, and added seven classrooms last year.

While the district and the East Grand Rapids Schools Foundation funded those computers, the program will continue with students bringing devices from home, leasing or purchasing them from a district-coordinated vendor site or from a vendor of their choice, or by receiving a scholarship to use a district device. Purchase and lease options could be available in March.

Teachers said the program has proven useful in student collaboration, instant feedback, organization, learning to write for a global audience and accessing work from home. Students will use computers in classes blended with the traditional classroom environment.

"This is not a replacement but an additional layer of support for student learning," said Heather McKinney, a high school English teacher leading a pilot classroom.

Students will need devices with at least 7-inch screens and up-to-date browsers, technology and assessment director Doug Jenkins said.

Jenkins said parents will be notified by email in January of the program, and an orientation fair will be held in February.

The cost to the district will be minimal because bond dollars allocated for technology have been used to equip classrooms, and Internet bandwidth recently was increased.

Jenkins said the focus is to add technology to teaching, not replace other methods.

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## New rules for Maine schools

Maine Today

By: Susan McMillan

December 6, 2011

[http://www.onlinesentinel.com/news/new-rules-for-maine-schools\\_2011-12-05.html](http://www.onlinesentinel.com/news/new-rules-for-maine-schools_2011-12-05.html)

*Officials want public feedback on how to evaluate educators*

AUGUSTA -- State officials are looking for public input as they craft new systems of accountability for schools and educators.

The Maine Department of Education will file an application on Feb. 21 to be released from some provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind law, including a requirement that all students be proficient by 2013-14 -- a standard many people say is unreasonable and impossible to meet.

To obtain a waiver, states must create new ways to evaluate schools and teachers.

"We'll still need to test all schools every year," Education Commissioner Stephen Bowen said on a conference call Monday. "We will need to look at how they're doing; we will need to identify schools that are underperforming, and we'll need to determine what we're going to do about it."

One criticism of No Child Left Behind is that schools have been measured on the basis of standardized test scores alone, Bowen said. Now Maine has the opportunity to include other indicators of effectiveness.

The department plans to gather input on what educators, parents and other stakeholders value in their schools through public forums in Bangor and Portland, an online forum and an online survey.

"I'd like to see us get close to a thousand responses," said David Connerty-Marin, spokesman for the education department. "We're looking for everybody. Teachers, of course, educators, parents, students, school board members."

The survey asks respondents to rank several potential tools for measuring a school's success, including rates of attendance, graduation or dropouts; parent, student or teacher surveys; parent engagement; and staff turnover rates.

Another major component for Maine's application will be developing a set of standards for teacher and principal evaluations. The federal guidelines require that evaluations incorporate standardized test results.

Bowen said evaluations probably will include other measures of effectiveness and won't be implemented fully until 2014-15, around the same time Maine transitions to a new statewide test now being developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

The state also must determine how to ensure that districts actually do adopt new evaluations. Withholding funding is essentially the only tool they have, Bowen said.

"You don't want to do that if you can possibly avoid it," he said.

Districts in Maine Schools for Excellence -- an initiative funded by a federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant -- already are working on new evaluations that incorporate student performance data.

Anson-based Regional School Unit 74 is one of those districts, and Superintendent Ken Coville said he's glad the state will set standards rather than imposing a specific evaluation system.

"If they set that model in place and allow the local involvement in the design, it will significantly enhance local buy-in and the effectiveness of the resulting evaluations," he said.

[Maine Education Association](#) Executive Director Rob Walker said the National Education Association and the state union support using student achievement in evaluations as long as test scores aren't the only measure incorporated.

Teachers don't have total control over a student's test scores, Walker said.

"Our teachers are working very hard, trying to deal with every student who walks through the door," he said. "We want to make sure that it doesn't hold the teacher accountable for all the sins that are taking place in the world."

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## Governor Bobby Jindal pledges school reform in '12

Daily Comet

By: Matthew Albright

December 5, 2011

<http://www.dailycomet.com/article/20111205/ARTICLES/111209773/1320?p=1&tc=pg>

Gov. Bobby Jindal hinted at major changes he has planned for the state's education system Monday during a visit to Dularge Middle School.

The visit kicked off a string of planned visits to elementary, middle and high schools throughout the state ahead of education reforms Jindal plans to enact in the coming year.

Jindal observed a few minutes of fifth-grade math teacher Madenna Voisin's class, then met with Superintendent Philip Martin, Assistant Superintendent Carol Davis and Dularge Middle Principal Cheryl Degruise.

"We came here to see our reforms in action but also to listen and see what we can do better to improve the lives of our kids," Jindal said. "We heard a lot that we can incorporate into our reform plan, including how critical it is to have effective teachers in the classroom, how red tape hampers a school's ability to make smart decisions with their dollars and how the state can be a better partner for our districts."

Jindal said he chose Dularge Middle for the start of his weeks-long tour because it earned a High Performing-High Poverty School designation. The school has a district performance score of 114.2, or a B+, an achievement considered laudable since 65 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Lower-income students face more education obstacles and generally don't do as well on high-stakes tests.

"It's a big honor for him to be here," Martin said. "He knows a lot about our schools, and he spent a lot of time asking us about what the state can do to help."

Jindal said Terrebonne Parish schools have implemented reforms he would like to see practiced statewide.

He cited:

- A teacher-performance incentive program that financially rewards teachers and schools whose students perform well on standardized tests.
- An emphasis on intervening with third-grade students who struggle with math and reading. The effort aims to bring them up to speed before they take the high-stakes LEAP test as fourth-graders.
- A pilot program that includes students' standardized scores in individual teacher evaluations.

Terrebonne is one of fewer than 10 school systems in the state to participate in the Act 54 pilot program, named after the legislative order that created it. The system bases 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation on a new system of principal evaluations and classroom observations.

The other 50 percent is based on a "value-added" assessment that tracks how much students improve over the course of a school term.

That improvement is largely measured in terms of standardized-test scores given at the beginning and end of the term. That has upset some teacher unions, who don't think standardized tests fully measure a student's skills.

Jindal said he wants the Board of Elementary and Secondary education to implement the new evaluation system statewide. He defended standardized tests as the only means available to concretely measure student ability.

“Student achievement has to be tied somehow to student results,” Jindal said.

Jindal pointed out that schools have long used advanced-placement tests and other exams to measure school and student performance.

Martin said the programs Jindal touted have worked well for the Terrebonne school system.

“These are things we've already tried that we think have led to some serious gains,” he said.

Martin said using standardized tests is fair for core subjects such as math and English language arts, although educators are still tweaking tests for courses such as art and music.

“As long as it's done in a fair, reasonable and scientific manner, I think it works,” Martin said. “We only apply value-added to core subjects, and for those we have hard, fast data based on test results.”

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## Minneapolis Union Will Help Authorize Charter Schools

Education Week

By: Stephen Sawchuk

December 5, 2011

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/12/minneapolis\\_union\\_will\\_authori.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/12/minneapolis_union_will_authori.html)

A nonprofit body set up by the Minneapolis Federation of Teacher has been granted the authority to charter schools, in what's apparently the first such arrangement of its kind in the nation.

An charter authorizer, let's be clear, is not the same thing as a charter-management organization. It does not act as management or get involved in the operations of such a school. Its main goal is to approve the new schools to open, to monitor them, and to shut them down if necessary if they fail to meet academic or financial benchmarks.

Minnesota's charter school law was updated and strengthened in 2009 (see section 41 [in this link](#)). The revisions give the state more flexibility to cut ties with an authorizer if it's not meeting its obligations.

Now, to answer the question I'm sure you have: No, the organization won't be able to give preferential treatment to schools whose staff want to organize. But authorizing schools with good teacher-management relations appears to be a priority of the body, which is named the Minnesota Guild of Public Charter Schools.

"The guild believes that strong partnerships between labor and management foster a high-performing school culture; the guild is committed to authorizing schools that give teachers a meaningful voice," [a statement](#) from the guild reads.

(And, one presumes, any school staff that want to authorize will certainly know where to look.)

The idea is the brainchild of MFT President Lynn Nordgren, and her affiliate received a grant from AFT's Innovation Fund to set up the new nonprofit. She'll sit on the guild's board, along with a variety of other folks from business, the city department of education, and labor organizations.

We'll be waiting impatiently to see what kinds of schools the guild authorizes, and whether their teachers choose to organize.

Coming up with new ways of managing and using teacher expertise, after all, isn't an easy job: A [separate report](#) from the Center for Reinventing Public Education, also out today, finds that despite more flexibility in some areas, like work hours, unionized charter schools often contain the same kinds of step-and-lane pay scales, due process, and grievance procedures (though expedited) as those in public schools.

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