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NATIONAL NEWS

States to get waivers on No Child tests

Associated Press

By: Staff

Aug. 8, 2011

<http://www.jsonline.com/news/usandworld/127286913.html>

States getting a way out of 10-year-old policy

The Obama administration effectively gutted the Bush-era No Child Left Behind law Monday, giving states a way out of a decade-long policy that focused on holding schools accountable but labeled many of them failures even if they made progress.

To get a waiver from the program, however, states must agree to education reforms the White House favors, from tougher evaluation systems for educators to programs tackling the achievement gap for minority students.

Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction will seek a waiver for the state, Superintendent Tony Evers said Monday.

The federal law, which requires every student to be proficient in science and math by 2014, is four years past due for reauthorization. But it's become mired in the increasingly partisan mood on Capitol Hill despite repeated calls from President Barack Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan for changes to be made before the school year starts. Obama sent an overhaul proposal to Congress 16 months ago.

Duncan has warned that 82% of U.S. schools could be labeled failures next year if the law is not changed. Education experts have questioned that estimate, but state officials report a growing number of schools facing sanctions under the law.

Republicans bristled at the move.

"I share the sense of urgency felt by state and local education officials across the nation. Unfortunately, more questions than answers surround the secretary's waivers proposal," said House education committee chairman John Kline of Minnesota.

Under the law, states were required to show that a higher proportion of students were reaching proficiency each year. Many had planned to achieve their biggest leaps in the later years because they counted on the law being rewritten by now.

A handful of states had already filed waivers begging for flexibility, while others simply said they were going to ignore the requirements of the law this year.

Calling No Child Left Behind a "broken" law, Evers said that Wisconsin officials intend to create a different accountability system for all traditional public schools, public charter schools and private voucher schools in the state.

Evers added he would include the new accountability system in his waiver request.

Green Bay Public Schools Superintendent Michelle Langenfeld called the potential for Wisconsin to get a waiver an "extremely positive development so schools can focus on student growth."

Green Bay did not meet the law's progress targets for reading in 2009-'10 and math in 2010-'11. But it is not under sanctions; those are only placed on districts and schools that miss progress targets for multiple years in a row.

Officials from the Kenosha Unified School District expressed caution about moving too quickly on the waiver plan, despite the fact that the district missed the latest reading and math progress targets in 2010-'11. Kenosha's public schools met the progress benchmarks in 2009-'10.

Superintendent Michele Hancock questioned whether it was wise to seek a waiver without knowing the exact reforms the government would require of states, said spokesman Gary Vaillancourt.

"It's something everyone needs to look at, but right now it's not something where we could say, 'Yes, let's do this,'" Vaillancourt said.

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Study Finds Learning Gains for Title I Students

Education Week

By: Sarah D. Sparks

August 9, 2011

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/09/01title1.h31.html?tkn=OZTFY9foIkWZoNYHcJrxI9%2BHSv03KwRKiKHw&cmp=clp-edweek>

While the U.S. Department of Education warns that a majority of schools are falling behind in meeting the student-progress targets required under the No Child Left Behind Act, a new analysis suggests that students who participate in the law's largest education program, the Title I program for disadvantaged students, are making strides in mathematics and reading.

In a [study](#) released Tuesday, the Center on Education Policy, a Washington-based think tank, analyzed the mean test scores as well as the number of students achieving grade-level proficiency in math and reading in 19 states with at least three years of student-testing data between 2002 and 2009. Researchers found that students in the Title I education program for students in poverty improved in math and reading during the 2002-2009 time span in most states with sufficient test data.

"A lot of people have found it fashionable to say that Title I doesn't work," said Richard M. Long, the executive director for government relations for the Washington-based National Title I Association. "Well, this says there are indications we are making progress. The real question is how can we make more progress and faster."

The study also noted that across 4th and 8th grades and high school, more states narrowed the achievement gaps between Title I and non-Title I students than widened them. In Tennessee, for example, 88 percent of 4th grade Title I students reached proficiency in reading by 2009, compared to 95 percent of non-Title I students. But gaps in other states, such as Massachusetts, were large: 64 percent of non-Title I 4th graders in that state and only 31 percent of their peers in Title I performed at a proficient level in reading.

Jennifer R. McMurrer, a CEP research associate and co-author of the study, said she was surprised to find that while Title I students continue to perform well below non-Title I students in math and reading, the gaps are smaller than those between poor and more-affluent students generally. Test-score gaps between participating students and those not in Title I narrowed in both subjects in grade 8 and in high school in a majority of the states studied.

"We looked very specifically at instances where gaps widened, and in many cases both of those groups were showing improvement, but the non-Title I students were growing faster. To me it was encouraging news about the potential impact of the Title I program," Ms. McMurrer said. "Title I is the largest federal program for education, and it's important not to disregard the progress of these kids."

Title I, created in 1965, is both the oldest and largest federal education program. It awards grants to states and districts to provide supplemental instruction to put students in poverty on an even playing field with their wealthier peers. It provides money to districts based on the number of students in poverty who live in their enrollment area, and can be used for a wide variety of activities, including supplemental instruction, smaller class sizes, enrichment materials and so on. Title I provided more than \$14.4 billion in grants to school districts in 2011, not counting the \$10 billion in supplemental money that was awarded through Title I for 2009 to 2011 under the financial stimulus law.

According to federal Education Department estimates presented at the National Title I Association meeting in Washington last week, the number of schools providing services via Title I rose by more than 5,000, to 56,625, from 2005 to 2010, and the number of students participating in the program jumped by more than 3.4 million, to 21.25 million, during the same time.

Nonwhite Hispanic students now make up the largest proportion of Title I students, nearly 36 percent, and English-language learners now account for 15.6 percent of all students in the program.

"They have more kids from poverty and language-minority populations that have entered into Title I, and yet you are seeing progress being made with closing the gap, so that's certainly positive," said Zollie Stevenson Jr., an associate professor of educational administration and policy at Howard University in Washington, and a former director of the federal Title I program under the administrations of both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

Mr. Long said NCLB has been in place long enough that researchers may finally be seeing the cumulative effects of its requirements for Title I schools, such as more stable annual testing and minimum credentials required for all teachers. Yet he cautioned that CEP's analysis does not dig into more nuanced data on the differences between states that saw gains and those that didn't.

"We should look at those 19 states and find out, in some depth, what they are doing, because their various practices seem to

be indicating that there are solutions," Mr. Long said.

Future of Title I

The CEP report comes as policymakers debate what form Title I will take in the next authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the current version of which is the No Child Left Behind law. Under U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the Education Department has favored competitive grants such as Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation over formula grants like Title I, which go to all states, to drive school improvement. Yet Mr. Stevenson said he doubts any competitive grants will replace Title I as the pre-eminent federal education program in the next ESEA reauthorization.

"Several generations of us will be dead before that happens, because formula grants are bread and butter for Congress members' districts," Mr. Stevenson said. "I don't think Congress has the disposition to move away from formula grant dollars. I don't think the administration is going to win on that. We'll just have to see what happens over time."

Rather, Mr. Stevenson thinks the next iteration of Title I will become more strict in how districts apportion their money to balance the needs of elementary, middle and high school students. As of 2010, the Education Department estimates that 59.1 percent of Title I students are in kindergarten through 5th grade, with 20.5 percent in middle school, 17.3 percent in high school, and the rest in preschool or ungraded schools. The CEP researchers found that 71 percent of eligible elementary schools receive Title I money, compared to 40 percent of middle schools and 27 percent of high schools.

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FLORIDA NEWS

Students allowed to use iPads on school buses

Herald Tribune

By: Christopher O'Donnell

August 8, 2011

<http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20110808/article/110809579>

School buses as moving classrooms?

Well, why not, the Manatee School Board decided Monday night as it voted to allow students riding on school buses to stay online under a policy that ends the ban on using lap-tops and iPads on buses.

The change was made after school principals said the ban was preventing technology-savvy students from working on homework assignments on their way to and from school.

Students will also be permitted to use devices like iPods providing they only use earphones in one ear so they can hear the bus driver.

"The school bus is now an extension of the education process," said Don Ross, director of vehicle maintenance and transportation.

The move reflects the increasing role that technology plays in education, a trend accelerated by the emergence of small, hand-held computers like iPads small enough to fit in student backpacks.

At Willis Elementary, every fourth- and fifth-grader has a laptop they use to turn class projects into online presentations.

Principal Bill Stenger said the new rule makes sense even if students are just listening to music or playing games.

"Some of the children are on the bus for a very long time," he said. "When kids are busy doing something and not fooling around, it's safer on the bus."

Another transportation change this year will allow school staff to view the location of buses using an online system that tracks buses through an onboard GPS device. Ross said that would be useful for schools especially when students go on field trips.

Officials also said that by December they they plan to replace 23 buses that do not have air conditioning.

The changes were announced as the district readies for the new school year that starts Aug. 22.

The district was plagued with bussing problems throughout the past school year that led to the replacement of Transportation Director Terry Palmer.

Glitches in a new \$105,000 bus routing system had thousands of parents getting wrong information about bus stop locations and led to some students waiting for a bus that never came.

Officials also blamed the new system for hundreds of drivers being owed back pay due to extra hours they worked that were not recorded.

The transportation department also came under fire because it instructed drivers to drop off students at unattended bus stops no matter how young. Superintendent Tim McGonegal later reversed the policy.

About 16,000 students ride buses to school in Manatee. Ross said the district is confident of a smoother start to this school year.

"We are ready," he said. "Every route has been redrawn and double checked," Ross said.

In other action the School Board approved the appointment of Connie Dixon to assistant principal at Willis Elementary.

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STATE NEWS

New Brunswick school group partners with national nonprofit to support public school reform

New Jersey Star-Ledger The Star-Ledger

By: Alexi Friedman

August 08, 2011

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/08/new_brunswick-based_better_edu.html

NEW BRUNSWICK — The New Brunswick-based school reform group Better Education for Kids announced today it partnered with StudentsFirst, a national nonprofit started by former Washington D.C. School Chancellor Michelle Rhee, which supports expanding charter schools and merit-based pay for teachers.

Begun in March by two New Jersey financiers, Better Education for Kids has promoted teacher evaluations based on student test scores and restrictions on tenure. It has praised Gov. Chris Christie's school reform efforts, and has raised the ire of the New Jersey Education Association, which mounted an expensive campaign last year attacking the governor's state aid cuts. A NJEA spokesman said the new partnership is one of many an anti-union movements working to end teacher tenure to save money.

The collaboration between the two nonprofit groups immediately gives Better Education for Kids a greater voice in the school reform movement, said Derrell Bradford, the group's executive director, in a telephone interview.

Bradford said the partnership "should help us fund raise and work on reform in the most productive way possible." He said the two groups will work on "grassroots organizing and political activities in the fall, supporting reform candidates running for election."

Hari Sevugan, a spokesman for the 500,000-member StudentsFirst — which was formed in December and hopes to raise \$1 billion — said it "can bring to the table a national platform," while complementing what he called the local group's "strong foothold in New Jersey."

"B4K has already become a known quantity in the state," added Sevugan in an interview following the announcement.

Rhee's lobbying organization released its blueprint for education reform in January and her report states that "tenure must be eliminated so that teachers feel best protected by the quality of their work and the role they play on the teaching team."

The partnership between Rhee's StudentsFirst and Better Education for Kids comes amid Christie's call for more charter schools and for allowing private companies to take over underperforming public schools.

In a news release announcing the partnership, the two groups said they "share the same vision: bipartisan, common sense education reform that puts students first, empowers parents and rewards great teachers and principals." It included words of praise for Rhee from Christie and Newark Mayor Cory Booker, who said he was "inspired by her no-nonsense vision for educational excellence and her willingness to do whatever it takes to make the school system better."

Steve Wollmer, spokesman for the NJEA, said he's not sure how the partnership will play out.

"Their agenda is (trying to) impose a corporate model on education," said Wollmer. "I don't think it works in corporations and it definitely doesn't work for education."

Staff writer Victoria St. Martin contributed to this report.

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Virginia schools chief welcomes No Child Left Behind testing waivers

Associated Press

By: Zinie Chen Sampson

August 8, 2011

<http://www.roanoke.com/news/breaking/wb/295515>

RICHMOND -- The head of Virginia's public schools said Monday that she welcomes U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan's plan to give states relief from some student testing mandates under the federal No Child Left Behind Law.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia Wright said Duncan and President Barack Obama are correct to recognize that many of Virginia's public school divisions view the benchmarks as unrealistic and that they improperly penalize some schools.

She said she would like Congress to conduct a comprehensive reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act - the original foundation for NCLB - but until that happens, she applauds the Obama administration for moving ahead to address what state school chiefs think is a dysfunctional law.

Under the proposed plan, the U.S. Department of Education would offer all 50 states flexibility on mandates if they embrace

other types of education reforms. Those would include initiatives that address college and career readiness; raising teacher and principal effectiveness; and improving the lowest-performing schools and closing achievement gaps among different student subgroups.

Duncan said details about the waivers will come in September.

No Child Left Behind aims to have every student proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. Each year, states are expected to make higher benchmarks. But such requirements have resulted in more schools being labeled as failing because not all students can meet the goals.

Wright said public schools should be held accountable for educating children and for ensuring they make educational progress. But she said the current NCLB benchmarking system doesn't take into account that not all children in all subgroups are able to show the same rate of progress, or that some states already had set a high bar when NCLB was adopted in 2002.

Localities are faced with escalating costs to comply with NCLB penalties, and Wright said most states are unable to afford to provide technical assistance to schools and districts that face sanctions. She added that some are improperly identified as needing improvement.

She said Virginia is among several states that are working together to come up with an improved way to measure growth in student academic achievement to be employed in the 2011-12 school year.

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NYC public school math, English test scores rise

Associated Press

By: Michael Gormley

August 8, 2011

<http://www.newsday.com/news/nation/nyc-public-school-math-english-test-scores-rise-1.3082032>

(AP) -- Mayor [Michael Bloomberg](#) on Monday said the gains made by New York City students on standardized tests is encouraging while the state education commissioner called the statewide results "stubbornly flat," with English proficiency dropping from a year ago.

The results, released Monday, show that 43.9 percent of New York City students met or exceeded the English proficiency standard. That's up from 42.4 percent last year. In math, 57.3 percent of city students were proficient, up from 54 percent last year.

Statewide, 52.8 percent of the students met the English standard, a drop from 53.2 percent. In math, 63.3 percent of students statewide met or exceeded the standard, up from 61 percent a year ago.

"Compared to the only bellwether we have -- the students in [the rest](#) of the state -- our students have come through," Bloomberg said at a news conference. "But as much progress as we have made, we know we have much more work to do."

New York City schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott, head of the nation's largest school system with 1.1 million students, said students are rising to the challenge.

"This is really [proof](#) that when expectations are raised, our students can rise to the occasion," Walcott said. "New York City students and families should be proud of their continued progress, even with these tougher standards for success."

[United Federation of Teachers](#) President [Michael Mulgrew](#) congratulated teachers and students on the results, but said the city Department of Education needed to make sure the improvements would continue.

"As a former classroom teacher, I know that real progress in student learning comes gradually, not in leaps and bounds," he said. "The DOE needs to come up soon with an instructional strategy that can keep this progress going, despite the problems we are facing next year like a dramatic rise in class size and the loss of hundreds of valuable programs."

State Education Commissioner John B. King Jr. called the test results "stubbornly flat over time."

"The Regents reform agenda is designed to change that, by driving long-term gains in student performance," said King, appointed to the job by the Board of Regents in May.

The statewide English score is a significant drop since 2007, when 77.4 percent of students statewide met or exceeded the standard. Before that, the statewide average was between 61 percent and 68 percent since 2006. Since then, the state set a higher grade for proficiency and an investigation is under way into "grade inflation" in which teachers or schools exaggerate grades to give the schools better ratings.

In addition, most seventh and eighth graders didn't meet the English standard statewide. The standards were raised in part because of the rising need for remedial classes in colleges.

The tests are given to students every year in grades 3 through 8, part of the state's testing system that expanded under the federal No Child Left Behind law. They are used to track the performance of students and schools.

This year, students had to answer more multiple-choice questions and each grade's test included at least one essay. In an effort to promote deeper instruction rather than simply "teaching to the test," the state no longer releases test questions after they were administered to serve as practice tests.

In the state's biggest city schools -- New York City, [Buffalo](#), [Rochester](#), [Syracuse](#) and [Yonkers](#) -- fewer students met or exceeded the math and English standards than in the state's urban, suburban and rural schools.

For example, 26.9 percent of students in Buffalo met or exceeded the English standard, down from 27.7 percent year. Thirty-one percent of Buffalo students met or exceeded the math standard, up from 29.8 percent last year.

Statewide, just 35 percent of black students met or exceeded the English standard, compared to 64.2 percent of white students. Forty-four percent of black students met the math standard, compared to 73.3 percent of white students.

Since gaining mayoral control of city schools in 2002 through the state Legislature, Bloomberg has sought to better evaluate teachers and make it easier and faster to fire bad teachers or deny them tenure.

He also has closed some schools in large neighborhoods that chronically underperformed such as the 71-year-old Columbus High School in Brooklyn. It was ordered closed in 2010. In the place of those schools came smaller schools with specialized focuses, such as the High School for Civil Rights and the World Academy.

But critics of such statistic-based tracking of education performance note New York City like many other urban districts has high proportions of students in foster care, who are homeless, and who are beset by other social problems that conflict with learning.

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